

Developing effective relationships between youth justice workers and young people: a synthesis of the evidence, REPPP review

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Developing Effective Relationships Between Youth Justice Workers and Young People: A Synthesis of the Evidence



D. Fullerton, J. Bamber, S. Redmond

RESEARCH EVIDENCE INTO POLICY, PROGRAMMES AND PRACTICE (REPPP) PROJECT
School of Law, University of Limerick

An Roinn Dlí agus Cirt
Department of Justice

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Developing Effective Relationships Between Youth Justice Workers and Young People: A Synthesis of the Evidence

REPPP Review
May 2021

About the REPPP project

The REPPP (Research Evidence into Policy, Programmes and Practice) project is a collaboration between the School of Law in the University of Limerick and the Department of Justice. The aim of the REPPP project is to improve the evidence base in relation to youth crime policymaking in Ireland and support efforts towards evidence-informed youth justice reform.

The authors are responsible for the views, opinions, findings, conclusions and/or recommendations expressed in the report.

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Foreword

I am delighted to present the **Developing Effective Relationships Between Youth Justice Workers and Young People** report.

This report is another critically important contribution by the Research Evidence into Policy, Programmes and Practice (REPPP) project at the University of Limerick. REPPP works in strategic collaboration with my department to improve the evidence base for youth crime policymaking, and this timely report will inform the implementation of the new Youth Justice Strategy.

In simple terms, the purpose of youth justice policy is to discourage young people from antisocial behaviour and provide practical support and guidance to encourage pro-social behaviour. Achieving these two objectives would make a significant contribution to community safety and reduce reliance on the formal criminal justice system.

The way that policy comes to life for young people involved in the youth justice system is through relationships formed with frontline youth professionals. This is the place in the system where the magic happens, where national policy transforms into personal behaviour change. This is the place where a youth professional and young person work together to change risky criminal pathways to ones where the young person starts to make more positive choices and take more positive actions.

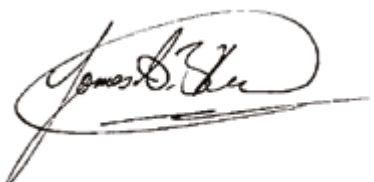


In economic terms, relationship building between youth professionals and young people accounts for a significant percentage of taxpayer investment in the youth justice system. Given the degree of investment and the importance of these partnerships between youth professionals and young people to implementing policy change on the ground in local communities, it is surprising that 'the relationship' has not attracted more scientific interest.

One significant reason for this is that defining or describing effective relationships is incredibly complex. To date, the research literature gives us only a partial understanding of what the most potent engagements with young people look like and why they are effective. It is therefore to be welcomed that this report highlights the active ingredients of successful exchanges between youth professionals and young people. Moreover, the findings are drawn together into an accessible framework that can be used to improve policy and support routine youth justice practice.

In recognition that the evidence is still developing, the report informs a major national action research project. The research involves REPPP working with sixteen Garda Youth Diversion Projects funded by my department. The project teams have willingly stepped forward to engage in the development of their services in an evidence-informed manner.

> The focus on effective relationship building in youth justice settings will be of interest to specialist youth justice practice and to other child and youth practitioners outside Ireland. This report is an important resource for translating the evidence into workable next steps for programmes and practice.



James Browne TD
Minister of State

Executive Summary

Across a range of human services, youth workers, social workers, therapists, correctional workers, volunteer mentors, foster carers and many others invest a great deal of time and energy in their professional relationships with young people. This is because there is widespread faith in the capacity of 'the relationship' to help young people build pro-social skills on the one hand and disengage from antisocial or criminal behaviour on the other.

While the literature is replete with outcome-related evaluations of formal evidence-based programmes, there is not much robust research evidence about what constitutes an effective relationship. To address the evidence gap, the authors of this report conducted a literature review to identify the key features of such relationships and to find out what helps the relationships to thrive, what hinders their development and in what ways they assist young people to change for the better.

There were two stages to the review. The first interrogated evidence reviews that had already collated and analysed evidence from single, primary-level studies. This high-level review of reviews sought to establish if and how the research topic had been addressed and to identify key themes warranting further exploration. The second stage involved a more focused systematic evidence review to drill down into and elaborate upon the identified themes. The findings from both stages provide a summary of the evidence relating to building and maintaining effective relationships between professionals and young people in youth justice settings.

The core skills involved in developing effective working relationships with young people include active listening, taking the time to get to know the young person, empathetic responding, advising, guiding, modelling pro-social behaviours and challenging ideas and behaviours in a non-threatening or judgemental manner. Equally important are worker qualities such as dependability, consistency and commitment to the young person. In addition, intangible qualities such as warmth and humour appear to be critical. The combination of skills and qualities helps to establish the mutual trust that is essential for developing and sustaining effective relationships.

Strengths-based approaches can build on the foundation of trust to instil hope and belief in the possibility of change. Working with the young person to identify and achieve goals and targets increases the young person's sense of agency. Working collaboratively also helps to develop and forge the bond, which is essential for a working alliance to be effective. The careful use of selective disclosure by the worker helps to demonstrate empathy and establish mutuality, which strengthens the alliance. Being caring, persistently demonstrating belief in the young person and providing emotional and practical supports help to sustain the relationship over the longer term.

Having high expectations for achievement within warm and responsive 'firm but fair' relationships helps young people to accept challenges to their behaviours without prejudicing the relationship. In achieving their goals, young people benefit from drawing on different types of supportive adult relationships, including coach-like (offering practical support), friend-like (offering social support) and parent-like (offering practical, social and emotional support) mentors.

No matter how clear, the messages, lessons and insights from the research cannot be aggregated into a 'magic bullet' for relational working. No practices or approaches can guarantee predetermined outcomes. This is because the limitless range of external forces at play in the lives of young people can overwhelm professional input. In any case, results are largely dependent on the agency of young people because nothing significant can happen without their willing and active engagement. This is not a counsel of despair but precisely why understanding, processing and practising relational work is so important.

> The key lessons from this review of the evidence suggest a new theoretical framework for relational practice. The framework acknowledges the many factors that positively or negatively affect the work, including organisational culture, community supports and family circumstances.

While many of these factors are beyond the control of individual workers, it is the workers who are key to success. Therefore, recruiting those with the right skills and qualities is crucial. It is equally important to ensure that the workers, once recruited, are given ongoing support, training and opportunities for development. Establishing appropriate levels of trust between worker and young person increases the chances of active engagement, involving iterative cycles of learning, testing and growth. Over time, and with persistence, positive development can be anticipated.

Abbreviations
used in the report

BBBS	Big Brothers Big Sisters
CMI	Case Management Inventory
CMO	Context-mechanisms-outcomes
CSSP	Center for the Study of Social Policy
EMMIE	Effective Mechanism Moderators Implementation and Economic Cost
GYDPs	Garda Youth Diversion Projects
REPPP	Research Evidence into Policy, Programmes and Practice
RNR	Risk-Need-Responsivity
VFMPR	Value for Money and Policy Review
YLS	Youth Level of Service



1 Introduction

The authors instigated this research to inform Irish youth justice policy objectives with a view to optimising the gains from professional relationships with young people. The authors sought to deepen their understanding from the research of what makes these relationships effective and how they can be developed and sustained in the long term. The findings are intended to inform a wider action research project – one that involves youth justice professionals – to examine how effective relationships work on the ground and in practice in Irish youth justice settings.

In chapter 1, the authors place the research in the context of wider international efforts with a view to establishing the importance of relationships in human services generally and in youth justice in particular. The chapter concludes by presenting the overall aims of the research and the questions that frame the enquiry. Chapter 2 explains how the questions were addressed in two overlapping parts. The first part involved a wide-ranging review of reviews from the research literature, the purpose of which was to establish whether or not the research questions had been investigated previously and, if they had, to capture how they had been answered. The second part involved a systematic evidence review of primary, empirical studies, the purpose of which was to look deeper into the evidence of effectiveness and bring into sharper relief the mechanisms that improve the likelihood of achieving beneficial outcomes.

In presenting the findings from the review of reviews, chapter 3 discusses the features of effective relationships and how such relationships are sustained and examines the types of beneficial outcome that can be expected, if not predicted. Drawing on these findings, the chapter sketches a basic model of the core elements involved in building, developing and sustaining professional relationships with young people. For shorthand purposes, this way of working is frequently referred to in this report as relational working. Chapter 4 looks at the findings from the systematic evidence review. Based on the main themes emerging from this review, the chapter ends by fine-tuning the basic model into a more developed theory of change. Chapter 5 draws from the research findings to outline a broad, evidence-informed framework, which can be used to develop and support effective relationships between professionals and young people in youth justice settings.

Relational work in the research literature

Compared to the literature on programme-based interventions, the significance of the relationship between professionals and young people has received relatively little attention (Matthews and Hubbard, 2007). Increasingly across human services, however, effective relationships are being viewed as central to achieving policy objectives in terms of enabling beneficial outcomes. Today, the importance of a positive relationship is consistently cited in research (Harder et al., 2013; Lester et al., 2018). It is variously described as core to the delivery of effective services (Bell and Smerdon, 2011), being at the heart of social work (Trevithick, 2003), a cornerstone (Alexander and Grant, 2009), an absolute precondition (O'Leary et al., 2013) and essential rather than incidental (Ingram and Smith, 2018).

In the social work literature, secure attachments with trusted adults are said to contribute to healthy emotional development in children by providing them with the skills, competence and capacity to regulate their own emotions, understand others and form healthy relationships (Shemmings, 2011; Furnivall, 2011). The central role of relationship has been described as the "golden thread" in children's lives, which should steer all planning and activity (Care Inquiry, 2013, p. 9). In the field of education, Cornelius-White (2007) highlights an association between person-centred, teacher-affective and instructional variables (such as empathy and warmth and encouraging learning and higher-order thinking) and improved student outcomes. According to Roorda et al. (2011), effective relationships are vital for children who are academically at risk, such as those from disadvantaged economic backgrounds or with learning difficulties. Li and Julian (2012) describe the quality of the relationship as "the active ingredient on which the effectiveness of all other programme elements depend" (p. 163).

The significance of relationship is echoed in the youth justice literature (Burnett and McNeill, 2005; Creaney, 2014; Drake et al., 2014; McNeill and Batchelor, 2002). Baker (2017, p. 33) describes its importance as follows:

> If a young person takes part in a programme or activity but is not interested in learning, not motivated to change and not committed to any programme goals then the intervention is unlikely to be successful. Promoting engagement is therefore about using professional skills and expertise to spark young people's interest in moving forward in life and helping them reach the point of willing and meaningful participation.

Researchers have made the case that supportive relationships with parents and other caring adults outside of the professional sphere contribute to improved wellbeing (Pineau et al., 2019; Whitehead et al., 2019), promote positive development (Sanders and Munford, 2014) and protect young people from poor health and social outcomes (Sieving et al., 2017; Wight and Fullerton, 2013). Supportive relationships between adults and young people have been associated with positive mental health (Hurd et al., 2010), academic achievement (Cornelius-White, 2007) and identity formation (Hurd et al., 2012).

Purpose and rationale for the study

At the time of writing, the youth justice system in Ireland is undergoing significant reform. The reform includes improvements in outcome-orientated data collection, the development of intensive community interventions to reduce further the demand for youth detention, new approaches to tackling the complex problem of children becoming engaged and stuck in adult criminal networks, and new children-centred developments in youth detention care. The remit of the University of Limerick's Research Evidence into Policy, Programmes and Practice (REPPP) unit is to support these reforms.

An important aspect of REPPP's youth justice work is to improve practice in youth-led interventions for young people involved in 105 Garda Youth Diversion Projects (GYDPs). GYDPs are interventions led by youth organisations located in communities across Ireland. The projects focus mainly, although not exclusively, on young people who are referred to the Garda Diversion Programme for offending and in situations where there are additional concerns regarding the risk of ongoing offending. In 2019, the number of young people involved in GYDPs was approximately 3,600.

The central role of relational work is highlighted in the GYDP Baseline Study commissioned by the Irish Youth Justice Service (Redmond, 2009a). In this policy document, the competence of project staff to build and sustain deep, genuine and purposeful relationships with young people is considered critical to the success of GYDPs (p. 50):

> Though obvious, it is worth stating that *if there is no relationship between the project staff and the young person, then there is no intervention* . . . the use of 'self', or the competence of the project staff member is undoubtedly instrumental in this.

In the same vein, a Value for Money and Policy Review (VFMPR)[1] of youth programmes commissioned by the Irish Government's former Department of Children and Youth Affairs (2014) states that policy objectives are given effect in the relationship between youth professionals and young people in targeted youth programmes. The review observes that effective relationships have many practical benefits for young people (p. 106):

> Importantly for the youth respondents interviewed in this VFMPR, the route for them achieving improvements in their lives invariably related to the acquisition of soft skills and attributes imparted and learned through their relationships with youth professionals – the ability to stop and reflect (e.g. about current behaviour), to take responsibility (motivation to change), to problem-solve (self-governance) and to execute decisions (agency). The intention is that these types of changes become hardwired and support the young person in negotiating the many risks and opportunities that they face.

Significantly, the review observes that it should be clear how programme governance activities enable high-quality relationships between youth professionals and young people (p. 40):

> The exchange between the front-line professional and the young person is the most important in targeted programmes. This interaction produces the desired policy change, an improvement in the young person's situation or circumstances. Therefore, any associated overhead cost or activity should demonstrate added value to this critical exchange.

The review goes on to recommend that relationships be the focus of youth policy-related examination (p. 162):

> It is important to be able to identify and reinforce the constructive ways in which youth work professionals work with participants, especially in terms of the translation of policy objectives into intended outcomes.

The time spent on building and maintaining relationships with young people amounts to a significant proportion of (GYDP) effort. By extension, this time represents significant taxpayer investment, the aim of which is to encourage young people to behave and think in more socially acceptable ways and move away from antisocial behaviour and attitudes. Despite the level of investment, the research into how relationships between professionals and young people bring about positive change has been limited to date. While marshalling such evidence is a top-down concern for policy makers, it is also a bottom-up priority for practitioners. The common goal is to ensure that young people in diversion projects access services that are informed by the best available evidence.

[1] Focusing on major spending programmes or policy areas, VFMPR reports are required evaluations of current spending in the Public Spending Code. The reports examine value for money in terms of rationale, economy, efficiency, effectiveness, impact and continued relevance.

Relationship with practice and practitioner wisdom

As shown in Figure 1, the research presented in this REPPP report is one part of a wider research process contributing to programme reform. The process involves:

1. **Reviewing the literature** to collate and present the research evidence insofar as the research relates to professional relationships developed with young people in youth justice contexts.

2. Undertaking an **action research project** with practitioners, youth organisations and the Department of Justice to integrate the research evidence with context-specific practitioner wisdom to produce new guidance on effective relationships. The new guidance will be trialled to gauge its effectiveness in terms of:
   a. *Relevance to practice:* The guidance needs to be useful for everyday relational practice in GYDPs
   b. *Outcomes:* Working with GYDPs involved in the Action Research Project to identify soft and proximal outcomes that align with youth justice policy objectives
   c. *Measurement:* Adopting or developing instruments and processes that can calibrate changes in soft and proximal outcomes

3. Supporting **programme reform** by sharing emergent evidence with all 105 GYDPs. This will be achieved through:
   a. A dedicated dissemination phase
   b. Incorporating the results of the literature review and Action Research Project into governance procedures through formal guidance for GYDPs
   c. Informing quality assurance processes
   d. Capacity-building activities

Figure 1: Research into practice



2 Research methodology

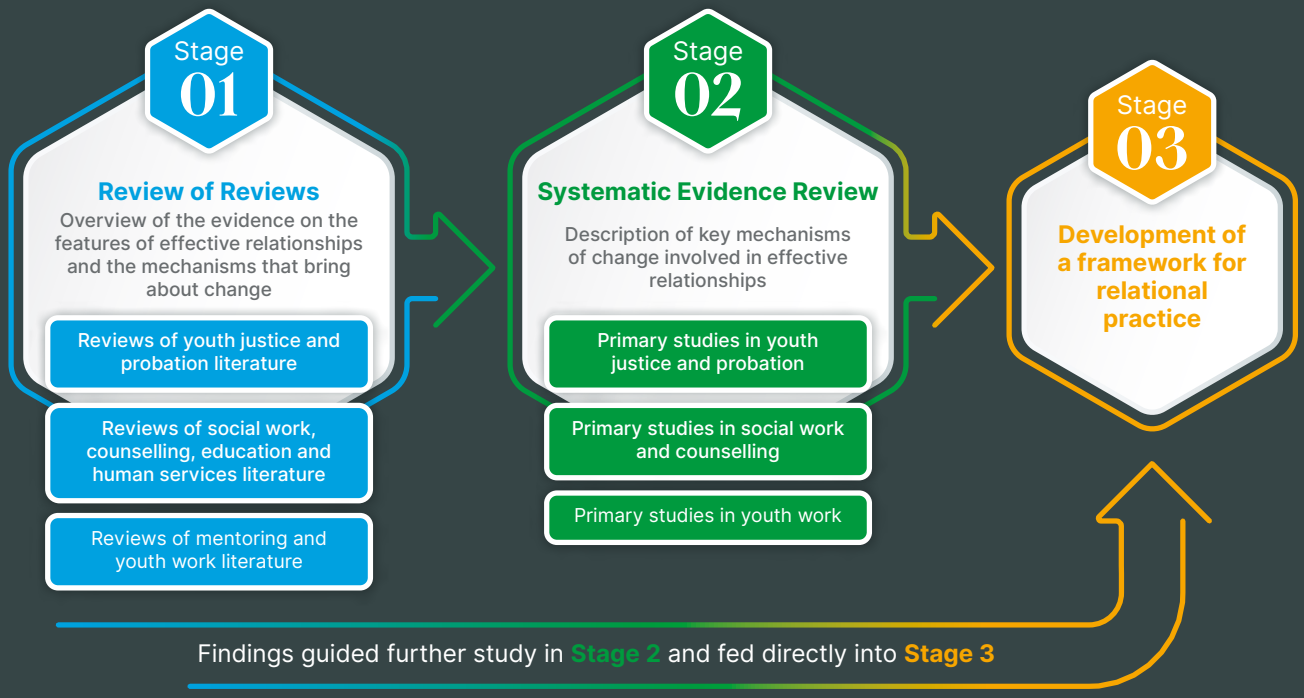
The authors of this report carried out a literature review chiefly to answer the following overarching research question:

> Do effective relationships between frontline workers and young people in youth justice settings give rise to positive change?

This chapter outlines the methods used by the authors to locate, select, quality assess and synthesise the evidence to address this research question. The chapter explains the rationale for applying a realist approach (Pawson and Bellamy, 2006), which seeks to understand the contribution made to achieving objectives in certain contexts rather than establishing irrefutable proof of generalised cause and effect.

Figure 2 illustrates the three-stage methodology adopted by the authors.

Figure 2: Overview of the research methodology



In stage 1, the authors undertook a review of reviews to scope the available literature on relationships and effectiveness. The focus was on relationships across a wide range of pertinent human services (see chapter 3 for findings). In stage 2, the authors carried out a systematic evidence review of primary-level research studies with a view to identifying the features of relationships in a more nuanced and detailed way and homing in on the mechanisms that are most likely to enable positive change (see chapter 4 for findings). Drawing on the findings from stages 1 and 2, the research culminates in stage 3 with the development of a framework for relational practice, which the authors hope will contribute to informing relational working in youth justice settings in Ireland (see chapter 5).

The rationale for a realist approach

The authors recognised from the outset that the concept of relationships is complex. For example, the VFMPR of youth programmes (Department of Children and Youth Affairs, 2014) observed that "the 'relationship' has retained an indefinable, enigmatic quality in terms of what it is and what it does" (p. 109). In response to complexity, reviews use transparent methodologies to access the widest body of evidence to provide reliable summaries of knowledge about a topic. However, the characteristics of professional/young person relationships and possible attendant outcomes do not readily lend themselves to traditional systematic effectiveness reviews. This is because the contexts in which these relationships take place can vary extensively from person to person, project to project, area to area and time to time. Furthermore, as the features of the relationships are difficult to codify, their outcomes are unlikely to be tested using experimental methods such as randomised control trials.

In acknowledging the limitations of traditional effectiveness reviews, the authors made a strategic decision to undertake a review in the realist tradition (Jagosh, 2019). This type of review attempts to provide a rich and nuanced understanding of complex social interventions. Realist approaches seek to offer policy and practice communities a "detailed and highly practical understanding of complex social interventions which is likely to be of much more use to them when planning and implementing programmes at a national, regional or local level" (Pawson et al., 2005, p. 21). Within this general approach, the methodology chosen for this study was informed by the EMMIE protocol (Johnson et al., 2015), which has been used to examine justice-related questions (e.g., Hunter et al., 2019) and is the methodology adopted in England by the College of Policing What Works Network (see Thornton et al., 2019).

As outlined in Table 1, the purpose of an EMMIE review is to estimate the overall effect direction and size (alongside major unintended effects) of an intervention (policy, practice or programme) and the confidence that should be placed on that estimate. Adding further dimensions to traditional effectiveness reviews, EMMIE reviews identify the main influences (moderators/context) affecting the production or non-production of the intended and major unintended effects as well as the activities (mechanisms/mediators) that are designed to bring about these effects. The intention is to locate and understand the key sources of success and failure. Full EMMIE protocols also consider the economic costs (and benefits) associated with the policy, practice or programme.

Table 1: Elements of an EMMIE review

E	The overall effect direction and size (alongside major unintended effects) of an intervention and the confidence that should be placed on that estimate
M	The mechanisms/mediators activated by the policy, practice or programme in question
M	The moderators/contexts relevant to the production/non-production of intended and major unintended effects of different sizes
I	The key sources of success and failure in implementing the policy, practice or programme
E	The economic costs (and benefits) associated with the policy, practice or programme

Source: Adapted from Johnston et al. (2015)

While the authors anticipated that the research was unlikely to yield data across all the EMMIE fields, they expected the research to provide evidence about overall effect direction, moderators and mechanisms. They also understood that in complex situations, it is often not possible, or at least extremely difficult, to establish direct causal links between activities and results. However, according to Mayne (2008), by carefully delineating the intentions and associated activities of an intervention and linking these to the intended outcomes, it is possible to establish a theory of change that is at least plausible. Such a theory can be tested in the realities of practice, subject to appropriate methods of evaluation or investigation, to identify the contribution made by the intervention amongst other factors that affect results.

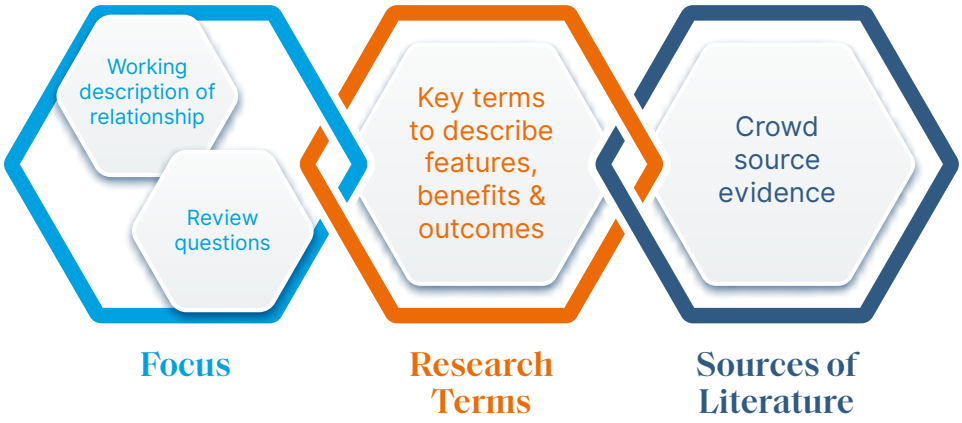
In short, the EMMIE review protocol was helpful in establishing the level of transparency needed to make explicit the core elements in a theory of change. In 'unpacking' the relationship between the frontline worker and the young person, this review of the literature sought to obtain a better understanding of the context (C) in which interventions and programmes take place and the mechanisms (M) that may contribute to the observed effects in terms of outcomes (O). In short, the review would explore and articulate what Pawson and Tilley (1997) describe as the linked context-mechanisms-outcomes (CMO) configurations:

Context + Mechanisms = Outcomes

Engagement with practitioners

Given the intended value of the review's findings to the policy and practice communities and in line with best practice (Green et al., 2016; Haddaway et al., 2017), the authors engaged youth practitioners in the evidence review at the earliest opportunity. An online survey was issued to 183 youth justice practitioners (128 youth justice workers and 55 Garda juvenile liaison officers) from across Ireland to seek advice on the review questions. The survey was also used to fine-tune the review procedures (e.g., keywords that might be used in the searches) and to crowd-source research studies that might be included in the review (Figure 3).

Figure 3: Consultation with youth practitioners



The review questions

Following the consultation process, the review questions were finalised as follows:

1. What are the features of an effective relationship between a frontline worker and a young person?
2. How are effective relationships enabled, and what helps/hinders them?
3. What is the evidence that effective relationships bring about positive change, and how have the benefits been described and measured?
4. What, if any, are the economic benefits of this relationship?

The first question examines the features of an effective relationship in terms of the mechanisms of change. The second considers how effective relationships are secured, sustained or undermined in terms of enablers and barriers. The third concerns the results of effective relationships in terms of outcomes. The final question seeks evidence of economic benefits accruing from creating and maintaining effective relationships. Table 2 shows how these questions relate to the EMMIE protocol.

Table 2: Relationship between research questions and EMMIE

	Description	Question
E	The overall effect direction and size (alongside major unintended effects) of an intervention and the confidence that should be placed on that estimate	What is the evidence that effective relationships bring about positive change? (Q3 part i)
M	The mechanisms/mediators activated by the policy, practice or programme in question	What are the features of an effective relationship between a frontline worker and a young person? (Q1)
M	The moderators/contexts relevant to the production/non-production of intended and major unintended effects of different sizes	How are effective relationships enabled, and what helps/hinders them? (Q2)
I	The key sources of success and failure in implementing the policy, practice or programme	How have the benefits been described and measured? (Q3 part ii)
E	The economic costs (and benefits) associated with the policy, practice or programme	What, if any, are the economic benefits of this relationship? (Q4)

In reflecting the essence of the EMMIE categories of effectiveness, mechanisms, moderators, implementation and costs, the questions enabled the authors of this report to incorporate the principles of a realist synthesis within the review process.

The research strategy

The authors addressed the research questions in two parts (Table 3).

Table 3: Two-part research strategy

Part	Purpose	Anticipated output
1. Review of reviews	Review a wide range of literature to (a) establish if and how the overarching research question has been addressed and (b) identify features, contexts, outcomes and key themes to explore in more detail.	Overview of the features of effective relationships and the mechanisms that bring about change
2. Systematic evidence review	Systematically search and appraise primary-level studies to more closely examine the key features and mechanisms involved in effective relational working.	Description of key mechanisms of change involved in effective relationships

Traditional systematic reviews assemble and combine the evidence from individual primary-level research studies (also described as empirical studies). However, as the volume of these reviews increase, researchers tend to assemble the evidence generated from this primary level by using a 'review of reviews' methodology (Becker and Oxman, 2009). The authors adopted this methodology in the first part of the research process to (a) establish if and how the overarching research question had been addressed and (b) identify issues warranting further exploration. As shown in Table 3 under part 2, these themes were further examined by means of a systematic evidence review of primary studies.

Searching reviews of reviews

To gain maximum insight into relational working, the research focused on literature that covered a wide range of human services, including youth work, positive youth development, mentoring, social work and counselling. Many positive youth development projects described in the literature adopt elements of youth work that are commonplace in Ireland. In general, as set out in the Irish Government's National Youth Strategy 2015–2020 (Department of Children and Youth Affairs, 2015), youth work offers planned programmes and interventions to enhance the personal and social development of young people through their voluntary participation.

In the interests of currency, the reviews had to be empirical studies involving young people and/or frontline workers published in English between 2005 and 2019. The primary or secondary focus of the studies had to be on the relationship between young people and workers within the context of effecting change in relation to offending, drug or alcohol use or social behaviour.

Initial database searches and iterative searches located in excess of 2,000 papers, many of which focused on the effectiveness of specific programmes at intervention level rather than on the relationship per se between professionals and young people. For example, in youth justice settings, several studies focused on specific manualised programmes such as multisystemic therapy or aggression replacement therapy without referring to the context of their delivery or to the intrinsic within-programme mechanisms involved in effective delivery. Once screened for relevance, a total of 104 reviews were downloaded and subjected to further relevance checking, after which 46 were reviewed in detail.

Table 4 shows the distribution of the reviews across the field/area, population/setting and focus of each review.

Table 4: Breakdown of the review of reviews

Field/Area	Population/Setting	Focus	No.
Youth justice	At risk young people/youth justice	Prevention	5
		Positive youth development; Mediation/mentoring	3
		Engaging young people	2
	Young offenders/youth probation	Managing offenders/treatment	5
		Helping alliance	1
	Young offenders	Trauma-informed approaches	1
	Detained youth	Engaging young people; Relationship building	1
		Mentoring	2
Probation	Adults/probation/supervision	Staff practice	2
		Rehabilitation	1
Youth work	Young people	Universal youth work	4
		Positive youth development	6
Mentoring	Young people	Social justice	4
Human services/ public services	General public	Building effective relationships	1
Social work	Young people in care; Vulnerable young people/public services	Relationship-based practice; Working alliance	5
Counselling	Children and young people	Relationship; Therapeutic alliance	2
Education	Pupils/schools	Child–teacher relationships	1

Of the 46 reviewed studies, all are cited in this report and listed in the References section under 'Review of reviews'.

The review of reviews process is summarised in Appendix 2.

Searching primary studies

The second part of the research strategy began with the same search terms that were used for the review of reviews. The search identified relevant published literature using electronic academic databases and hand searches of selected journals. To ensure currency with practice and policies, in general, only studies in English from 2005 onwards were included. However, some key seminal research outside of this timeframe was included for background and context. Eligible studies were required to present findings from empirical research, with either a main or secondary focus on the relationship between the frontline worker and the young person. While some opinion papers were included to set the context for the review, most were excluded. To fully capture the range of studies (i.e., qualitative and quantitative) that might provide evidence to answer the research questions, no exclusion criteria were set based on the research design of the primary study (e.g., survey, qualitative study, secondary analysis or experimental design).

Of the 163 primary studies that were downloaded and assessed for relevance, the authors reviewed 77 in detail. Of those 77 studies, 67 are cited in this report and listed in the References section under 'Primary studies'.

The stages and procedures involved in the second part of the research are summarised in Table 5.

Table 5: Stages and procedures of the systematic evidence review

Stage	Detail
Locating the evidence	A systematic and transparent search strategy was used to identify published and unpublished (grey) literature on the topic.
Relevance checking and quality assessment	Located papers were checked for relevance based on the inclusion/exclusion criteria.
	Eligible papers were assessed for methodological quality.
Data extraction	Details of each included study were extracted into summary tables.
	Findings from the studies were coded in table format and then grouped by theme.
Data synthesis	Summaries of the primary studies were synthesised and narratively grouped by research question and study focus.

Further information on the systematic evidence review process can be found in Appendix 3.

Limitations of the research strategy

Before presenting the main findings from the review of reviews and the systematic evidence review, it is important to acknowledge the limitations of the search strategy. The original aim of the review was to explore the role of relationships through the lens of the EMMIE review process. However, after engaging with frontline workers, the questions were revised. While the revised questions captured the essence of the EMMIE categories, they placed more focus on the contexts and mechanisms of the relationship and less on all other elements.

Notwithstanding the robustness of the EMMIE design, it is inevitable that the categorisation of evidence into the relevant constructs is only as strong as the data available. In this research, for example, it was not possible to comply with the normative request that "the estimation of costs should ideally enumerate the complete portfolio of costs that are necessary to implement an intervention" (Johnson et al., 2015, p. 469). In recognising that systematic reviews are time consuming to conduct and require pragmatism, Johnson et al. (2015, p. 470) note:

> Where an extended search proves to be impractical, we suggest that the review authors note this and synthesize what evidence is uncovered as it speaks to each dimension of EMMIE. Moreover, to set an agenda for primary studies, one role of future SRs will be to explicitly note the absence of evidence for each dimension of EMMIE.

More generally, in addressing the overall review question, the central focus is the relationship between the frontline worker and the young person. To unpack the 'active ingredients' in an effective relationship, the primary task of this review was to identify the interpersonal factors or the interactions between the frontline worker and the young person (i.e., mechanisms) that are involved in bringing about better outcomes for the young person. However, during the process of synthesising the evidence, the positive or negative influence played by external factors such as organisational culture and the influence of parents/families became apparent. For example, the literature on adverse childhood experiences suggests that young people who have experienced a high number of adversities are at a higher risk of becoming involved in crime (Craig et al., 2017; Farrington et al., 2006). There is also emerging evidence on the role played by economic poverty on executive control and the ability to make good decisions (Mullainathan and Shafir, 2013).

3 Findings from the review of reviews

This chapter examines the findings from the review of reviews. The scope for this examination is necessarily permissive, with literature sources deriving from professions across the human services (including education, counselling, social work and health services), positive youth development/youth work, mentoring, and youth justice/probation. The findings are presented according to the research questions below:

1. What are the features of an effective relationship between a frontline worker and a young person?
2. How are effective relationships enabled, and what helps/hinders them?
3. What is the evidence that effective relationships bring about positive change, and how have the benefits been described and measured?
4. What, if any, are the economic benefits of this relationship?



In what follows, the focus in response to question 1 is on the skills, qualities and activities of the professional in helping to develop and maintain a working relationship with a young person. The response to the second question concentrates on the organisational and other external factors that support or undermine relational working. The issue posed by question 3 – evidence of effectiveness – is examined in terms of the outcomes associated with relational working and the way that outcomes have been described and measured. As was anticipated by the authors, the evidence is limited in the sense of establishing causal links between activities and results and is largely silent on question 4, the issue of economic benefits.

The chapter concludes with a summary of the main points, which are distilled into a rough 'first cut' at a basic model to explain effective relational working. The model highlights the context (C) in which interventions and programmes take place and the mechanisms (M) that may contribute to the observed effects in terms of outcomes (O). This basic model is developed and extended in chapter 4, which reports on the findings of part 2 of the research – the systematic evidence review.

The features of an effective relationship

In their report on the successful delivery of services and support for children at risk of child sexual exploitation, Lewing et al. (2018) view the trusted relationship as fundamental. They consider practitioner characteristics that are central to effective relationships, and they stress the importance of the ability to build the relationship in a professional manner (Lewing et al., 2018, p. 27):

> This is not about being trendy and trying to be 'one of the mates'; it is about being personable and friendly, and able to build the relationship within a professional boundary.

In building such a professional relationship, the attributes commonly identified across the reviews include the ability to empathise, demonstrate commitment and belief in the young person, display warmth and genuineness and "recognize and acknowledge the 'reality' of the 'lived experiences' of young people" (Prior and Mason, 2010, p. 215). These and other acknowledged attributes are shown schematically in Table 6.

Table 6: Worker attributes that are important for the relationship

Sample reviews of reviews	Attributes of the worker															
	Approachable	Committed/Persistent	Confidential	Dependable	Empathetic	Fair	Genuine	Honest	Humorous	Interested	Listens	Non-judgemental	Patient	Resilient	Respectful	Trustworthy	Warm
Adler et al. (2016)						●									●		
Bamber et al. (2016)		●			●					●	●						
Bell and Smerdon (2011)			●	●								●					
Creaney (2014)					●						●				●		
Lewing et al. (2018)	●	●			●				●		●	●		●			●
Orsi et al. (2010)		●				●					●					●	
Prior and Mason (2010)					●	●	●				●				●		●
Shapland et al. (2012)				●	●			●				●			●	●	
Trotter (2006)				●				●									
Whitehead et al. (2019)			●	●	●		●						●		●		
Winter (2015)	●	●						●		●	●						

Reviews identified the importance of openness, enthusiasm, taking young people's concerns seriously and being optimistic about the young person's ability to change (Mason and Prior, 2008). Ways of working included being fair (Orsi et al., 2010) and adopting strengths-based approaches, such as encouraging the young person to be involved in decision making (Akiva and Petrokubi, 2016). This latter feature meant working 'with' rather than 'on' or 'for' the young person when setting goals and planning (Matthews and Hubbard, 2007; Shapland et al., 2012). Skills deemed important in the reviews include good communication, active listening, negotiating, empathetic encouraging, problem management and the ability to challenge ways of thinking or behaving (Shapland et al., 2012).

In their review on the role played by relationships with young people in care, Welch et al. (2018) note that engaging young people by means of the helping relationship was traditionally considered to be the core function of social work. The young people valued worker qualities such as reliability, honesty, availability, interest and effective listening. Regarding approach, they valued the worker taking them seriously, accepting and respecting them, and being ambitious for and committed to them. In *Someone to Care* (Barnardo's, 2014), the young people described needing someone "to care about them, someone to talk to, someone to be with, someone to set standards, and someone to show them the way" (in Welch et al., 2018, p. 8).

For care leavers who have experienced poor or disrupted family relationships or have faced neglect, emotional, physical or sexual abuse or rejection, it can be difficult to trust adults and form secure relationships. Welch et al. (2018) argue that such young people are in great need of supportive relationships in their journey to adulthood. This point is echoed by Holden and Sellers (2019); they argue that securing supportive relationships is particularly important for young people with a history of poor adult relationships and attachments (p. 66):

> Children with histories of interactions with inadequate, uncaring, unresponsive, or abusive adults have abandoned the strategy of depending on adults for assistance and have developed other maladaptive or ultimately self-defeating responses.

The social work literature consistently makes reference to the therapeutic value of supportive relationships (Moore et al., 2018, p. 69):

> Children and young people across multiple studies place considerable importance on the value of consistent, reliable, strong, and lasting relationships with trusted workers, and the therapeutic value of such relationships in promoting security and wellbeing is recognized.

According to Bellis et al. (2018), one trusted adult can make a significant difference to help build resilience in young people with adverse childhood experiences. Securing a meaningful relationship can be challenging for workers, however, as young people's previous negative and abusive encounters can make it difficult for them to trust adults (Winter, 2015). In such cases, the worker must overtly demonstrate their commitment and dependability. The benefits associated with establishing a trusted relationship with an adult have been described in research with detained young people, where the structures offered by positive relationships with staff are said to provide young people with an opportunity to thrive (Bamber et al., 2016).

Regardless of the intervention or programme, the evidence consistently indicates that young people respond to interventions when they believe the staff are interested in their wellbeing and can build trusting relationships with them (Robertson et al., 2006). This message is repeated by Adler et al. (2016) in their review of international evidence; they conclude that young people "tend to value a relationship that is warm, open, and non-judgemental, indicating that this helps them to engage with the intervention and work towards change" (p. 14). This emphasis on warm relationships fits with other calls to make the face-to-face role of the practitioner central to positive outcomes (Burnett and O'Neill, 2005; Drake et al., 2014). The message emphasises the potency of affective attributes within relationships.

Some authors take the view that the 'relationship' is itself the intervention (rather than simply a prop or conduit for activities or programmes). For instance, drawing on evidence from psychotherapy, Moore (2017) proposes that approaches work not because of the unique contributions of individual models of intervention but because of the personal qualities of the therapists themselves and the therapeutic alliance, or joint working relationship, that they create between themselves and the client. McNeill (2006) argues that the quality of the relationship formed between the professional and the young person, rather than the content of any intervention, is the real driver in preventing future offending.

Relationships also emerge as being central to meaningful participation in mandatory services (Smith et al., 2011). Authors researching youth justice (Creaney, 2014; Prior and Mason, 2010) have called for a greater focus on relationships because engagement enables the change from passive involvement to active and willing participant (Mason and Prior, 2008). As passive involvement is not enough, the implication is that specific skills and knowledge (techniques), in addition to skills and knowledge associated with the type of intervention, are required to facilitate engagement.

In relation to youth work, Rodd and Stewart (2009) depict the relationship as "the glue that holds our work together" (p. 4) and as a primary goal rather than simply a means to delivering a service. In the same study, Rodd and Stewart (p. 4) cite Martin (2003) as follows:

> Other professionals will normally form a client/professional relationship in order to deliver a service (counselling, education, or an outdoors experience). In contrast, a youth worker will see the relationship as a primary goal, and use the service they provide as a context within which that relationship can be developed . . . The key difference is that counsellors or teachers will develop a relationship in order to help them do their job. For youth workers, the relationship is their job.

Youth workers' relationships with young people have been described as possessing both multi-dimensional educative components and therapeutic value (Rodd and Stewart, 2009). Based on interviews with experienced youth workers working in different settings in New Zealand, Rodd and Stewart suggest that the relationship formed with young people allows the young people to achieve their programme goals. This principle applies whether it is to keep the young person in school or link them to appropriate support services. While acknowledging the difficulties in pinning down the outcomes of the relationship, one youth worker described the relationship's intrinsic value in the following way (Rodd and Stewart, 2009, p. 5):

> The relationship has some value, particularly with young people . . . in terms of getting outcomes and behaviour change. Things are changing for young people, we might work with them for a few months, and they get on top of their substance use issues and then something completely different comes along . . . the actual behavioural change is so transient and chaotic, so the relationship is like this constant thing, that they can come back to, that they might not necessarily have with any other adults around.

According to the same worker (pp. 5-6):

> The most important thing that a youth worker can do is establish a positive relationship with the young person . . . The relationship is the tool, it is my workplace, if I don't have the relationship I can't achieve much.

Given its central role in engaging young people with services, it is important to understand how both relational and organisational factors can support or hinder the development and maintenance of effective relationships.

Factors that enable or hinder the work

Whitehead et al. (2019) outline a range of supporting factors that enable the development of trusted relationships between adults and young people:

- Young people being able to choose their preferred adult (*respect*)
- Youth and adult matched on sociodemographic criteria, such as sex, ethnicity and socioeconomic status
- The ability to raise any issue without judgment (*non-judgemental approach*)
- Structures or activities that promote regular, long-term engagement (*time and buy-in*)
- Shared interests between youth and adult (*connection*)
- The adult's willingness to 'go the extra mile' (*commitment*)

The brackets are added in the bullet points above and below to denote the relationship to cross-cutting themes that occur regularly throughout the literature. These themes are considered further in the next chapter. Dunne et al. (2014) identified relational factors that appear to support the work, including:

- Active outreach to young people (*proactive*)
- Flexibility, accessibility and adapting to the needs of young people (*person-centred approach*)
- Learning opportunities, goal setting and recognition of achievements (*working alliance*)
- Safe, supportive environments enabling young people to experience life, to make mistakes (*non-judgemental*)
- Commitment from young people, youth workers and the community (*commitment*)
- 'Standing on their own feet': allowing young people to drive their own learning and development and to have autonomy (*strengths-based approach*)

Others have emphasised the importance of adopting a person-centred and strengths-based approach rather than 'one size fits all' (Bamber et al., 2016, p. 16):

> It is equally important to appreciate that building relationships will vary according to the needs of the young person. This means that personalised and targeted relationship building is required to enable young people to participate fully in activities that can lead to the development of pro-social outcomes.

Bamber et al. (2016) argue that engagement with detained young people needs to embody a cluster of developmental practices, as shown in Table 7.

Table 7: Core elements of relationship building

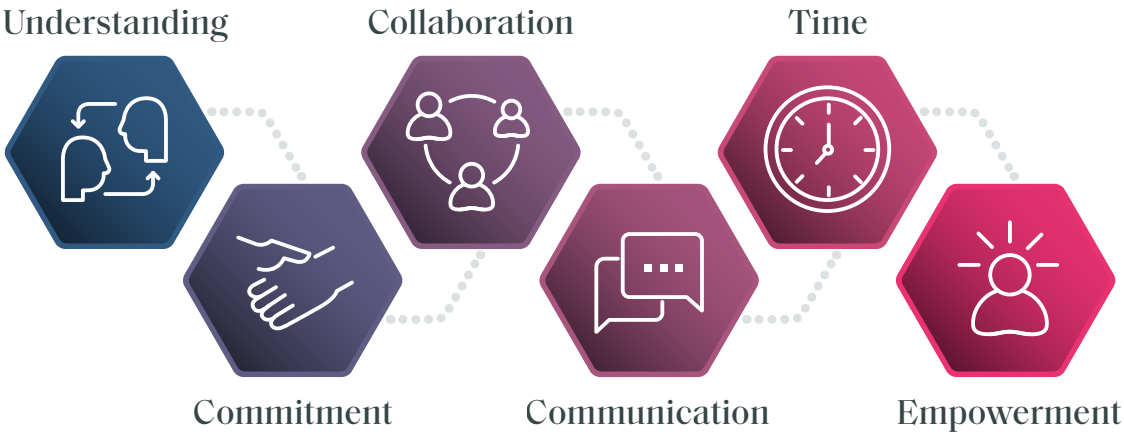
Element	Explanation
Co-production	Outcomes emerge as results of interactions between staff and young people. This is dependent on the engagement of young people and the capacity of staff to create and sustain these relationships.
Purposeful conversation	Involves focusing staff interactions on building and expanding the communication efforts and strengths of the young people, in which listening and paying attention is a conscious, deliberate and continuous activity but one that has the potential to be a powerful therapeutic intervention.
Assessment	Refers to judgements staff make when they are gauging how a young person is reacting and feeling in the moment or more formal, explicit, transparent and structured processes that may utilise standardised measures and tests.
Teachable moments	Occur when, for a variety of reasons, a young person may be more open and receptive than usual. In these moments, staff can model positive behaviours in their everyday interactions with the young people.
Dialogue	Is at the heart of non-formal learning (which can help build social and emotional competence) rather than authority and instruction.

Source: Adapted from Bamber et al. (2016)

Shapland et al. (2012) cite Healy's 2010 research on probation supervision in Ireland, which placed value on the relationship, concentrated on work with the individual and offered practical assistance. Healy's study attests to the potential of a working alliance in which probationers and probation staff agree on the importance of goal setting and where each party brings effort and resources to the task and allows for goals and actions to be set up jointly. Cited in Shapland et al. (2012), Appleton (2010) found that probationers valued direction with practical issues, advice on how to tackle practical problems and support with emotional problems. The probationers reported that they "want to be listened to, and for their probation officer to take the time to recognise them as individuals and to develop a relationship with them" (Shapland et al., 2012, p. 12).

Bell and Smerdon (2011) attempt to summarise the key relational factors by identifying six elements that enable or, by omission, undermine effective relationships (Figure 4).

Figure 4: Six elements underpinning effective relationships



Bell and Smerdon (2011) also describe interpersonal ways of working, such as empowerment and collaboration, that require the individuals to have trust and confidence in each other. Where the role of the worker is to support the individual to change ways of thinking or behaving, the ability to confront and challenge the individual without damaging the relationship is viewed as crucial.

Bamber et al. (2016) describe bringing into play the sorts of attributes and skills outlined in Figure 4 as an art and a science (p. 4):

> There is an art and a science to relationship building. The art involves commitment, enthusiasm, and perseverance in the face of difficulties, a willingness to be flexible and the capacity to come up with creative solutions. The science comes from systematic non-biased attention to research and other forms of evidence gathering, including consultation, and learning from practical experience.

Bamber et al. (2016) argue that professionals must adopt a comprehensive approach to building and sustaining relationships with detained young people and that such an approach should involve:

1. Setting out a clear theory of change and being clear about intended outcomes
2. Providing an enabling structure through routine actions, specific activities and specialised interventions
3. Focusing on the core elements of relationship building
4. Ensuring that the organisational environment reinforces the intended practices
5. Enabling learning and development for young people and staff
6. Capturing and measuring the desired change
7. Learning through continual improvement cycles, evaluation and review

Notably, in this conceptual model, planning, monitoring and evaluation activities (points 1, 2, 6 and 7 above) are intrinsic rather than separate activities.

Enabling or disabling organisational environments

O'Dwyer (2017) notes the importance of selecting, screening, training, matching, supporting and supervising mentors as well as the appropriate involvement of parents/carers. Echoing the importance of selection procedures in creating a culture that supports a working alliance, Matthews and Hubbard (2007) recommend hiring people with the right values and skills. This involves exploring their beliefs about changing behaviour and assessing their ability to develop strong working alliances. Matthews and Hubbard also note the importance of providing staff with skills training, such as motivational interviewing skills, to enable them to form strong working alliances, and of matching the young person to staff based on personality characteristics, interests and skills. According to Bamber et al. (2016, p. 19):

> There needs to be a way of building skills and capacity through training, which can be of a general nature or focused on specific issues, e.g. dealing with aggression. Training needs to be supplemented with other methods, which could include formally and informally sharing experience, knowledge, resources, and tools on a regular basis. Systematic support for staff needs to be provided through supervision, mentoring, coaching, and peer review processes.

Research also highlights factors that impede good outcomes. For example, relationships in which the mentor feels overwhelmed, burned out or unappreciated result in early mentoring terminations (Herrera et al., 2013; Spencer, 2007; Spencer et al., 2017). The environment or setting in which the support is offered is frequently cited as an important factor that is not always in the control of the worker. For example, in their review of trauma-informed approaches to working with young offenders, Branson et al. (2017) identified the importance of creating a safe agency environment for the delivery of the support, which included "promoting respectful youth-staff interactions" (p. 641). Other factors include the young person's external assets, such as family support and community connectedness, which may influence specific responsivity (Baker, 2017). According to Dunne et al. (2014), connectedness involves partnerships with other agencies, such as formal education and social work, so that young people can access a range of services to meet their needs.

Dickson et al. (2018) undertook a systematic review of process evaluations to examine how positive youth development interventions were implemented, how young people received them, and how this was affected by contextual characteristics of places and persons. As did other reviewers, Dickson et al. identified relevant factors such as the importance of staffing continuity to support implementation but they also identified the need for cultural sensitivity and the benefits of collaboration with local communities. For example, in a study of after-school programmes, site coordinators reported that effective implementation and sustainability relied on minimising staff turnover. High staff turnover had an impact on programme continuity and made it impossible to sustain mentoring relationships.

In their review on the quality of probation supervision, Shapland et al. (2012) examined offenders' and probation staff's views on the service. In one reported study (Annison et al., 2008), probation officers described direct work with offenders, building relationships with people and bringing about positive change in individuals as the most satisfying aspects of their work. Form filling and repetitive paperwork, high workloads and resource shortages were among the least satisfying aspects of the role. Indeed, officers expressed "serious concern that reliance on quantitative data was over-riding the 'softer' elements of good practice" (Annison et al., 2008, p. 267).

According to Whitehead et al. (2019), excessive formality, characterised by a narrowly defined role with strict, often professional boundaries and overly restrictive rules and regulations, can undermine the development and maintenance of relationships.

Degner et al. (2010) describe how organisational factors, such as complex administrative processes and a lack of continuity of staff due to frequent staff turnover, can interfere with daily interactions between young person and worker. This point on administrative burden is echoed by Winter et al. (2016), who argue that within residential childcare, a lower priority is given to building, maintaining and nurturing relationships with young children than to form filling and performance management.

Mechanisms leading to change

While acknowledging some of the methodological limitations of the evidence, Whitehead et al. (2019) found that the greatest potential benefit arises when there is a high-quality youth–adult relationship. They describe features of the relationship that include attributes of the professional but also point to aspects of the approach adopted within the relationship. They note that when young people are asked about the outcomes of the relationship, they consistently view the trusted adult role as positive and indicate that it can help achieve outcomes such as higher educational attainment, optimism, self-efficacy and reduced internalising symptoms.

Winter's (2015) review on supporting positive relationships for young people in care suggests that relational-based models, such as the social pedagogic Head, Heart and Hands approach, have the potential to "provide a strong platform upon which to develop practice" (Winter, 2015, p. 14). The approach was trialled in England to help foster carers to develop strong relationships with cared-for children (McDermid et al., 2016). Foster carers reported that the approach helped them express warmth, respect and genuine affection for the young people and provided them with a language and framework in which to think about that relationship.

The broader literature on the working alliance/therapeutic relationship provides some important insights into possible mechanisms for bringing about change. The relationship is described in the literature as having three primary components: a sense of bond, a shared agreement on the goals of the therapy,

and a mutual agreement on tasks required (Bordin, 1979). This alliance has been identified as central to counsellor–client relationships in the fields of counselling/psychotherapy (Martin et al., 2000; Castonguay et al., 2006 in Matthews and Hubbard, 2007), with some authors attributing 30% of patient improvement to the alliance alone (Lambert and Barley, 2001).

According to Matthews and Hubbard (2007), the quality of a working alliance correlates positively to specific client characteristics, such as psychological mindedness and expectation of positive change, and negatively to others, such as a tendency to be avoidant, interpersonal problems and depressive cognition. Quality is also positively associated with specific counsellor characteristics, including empathy, flexibility and interpretative precision, and negatively correlated to others, such as rigidity or a tendency to criticise.

In their review of the therapeutic alliance in mandatory services, Orsi et al. (2010) describe research with young offenders where the young people believed the alliance was the outgrowth of an interpersonal, rather than professional, relationship with the worker. In mandatory youth probation settings, the term 'helping alliance' is used to reflect the nonclinical setting in which probation services are delivered and to "reflect the notion that any professional within a youth-serving agency is a change agent with the capacity to promote positive change among the youths they serve" (Matthews and Hubbard, 2007, p. 11). However, Matthews and Hubbard acknowledge that the role of the working alliance in bringing about change requires further exploration.

One review examined the extent to which the therapist's adherence to psychotherapy guidelines and their competence (i.e., the therapist's skills) play a role in predicting therapeutic outcomes in children and adolescents (Collyer et al., 2019). The review found the relationship between adherence or competence and outcomes is variable depending on the intervention and the client group. For example, while adherence was found to play a role in predicting outcomes in multisystemic therapy, there was less evidence for such a relationship with cognitive behavioural treatment. The meta-analysis indicated a small but significant relationship between therapist adherence to the intervention and outcome, but the authors noted that "the small size of effect suggests that outcomes are likely to be more strongly associated with factors other than adherence" (p. 417). As only a small number of studies considered the interaction between adherence and therapeutic alliance or competence, the analysis was not able to consider the role of such factors on the outcomes. Collyer et al. (2019) call for a greater understanding of the role of adherence and competence (i.e., skills) in predicting treatment outcomes from evidence-based therapeutic practice and recommend that (p. 429):

> Factors such as youth risk, therapeutic alliance and competence, which may potentially interact with adherence effects, should be more consistently measured and controlled for to enable an understanding of the adherence–outcome relation over and above the influence of these factors.

Dowden and Andrews' (2004) review extends Andrews and Kiessling's (1980) study of effective practice in probation on the five dimensions of core correctional practice:

1. Effective use of authority ('firm but fair' approach)
2. Anti-criminal modelling and reinforcement
3. Problem solving
4. The use of community resources
5. The maintenance of good interpersonal relationships between staff and offenders

Dowden and Andrews examined if and how the five dimensions had been applied in practice. While only a small proportion of the programmes had adopted core correctional practice in their work, when the elements were applied (particularly the focus on interpersonal relationships between staff and offenders), the programmes were associated with greater reductions in recidivism.

Some elements of core correctional practice have been identified in the literature on positive youth development. For example, in their review of the process evaluations, Dickson et al. (2018) found that supportive relationships maximised the acceptability and potential impact of interventions and that having calm and authoritative staff was as important within the context of the relationship. The authors noted "the importance of program providers attending to young people in a calm and nurturing yet authoritative way, including in response to any challenging behavior exhibited by participants" (Dickson et al., 2018, p. 1116).

In their review of universal youth work, McGregor (2015) report on a study undertaken by Deuchar and Ellis (2013) of a targeted programme delivered to young people involved in antisocial behaviour and gang involvement. In this study, youth work interviewees describe the transformative effect of participatory youth work approaches on some of the young people in terms of how well they integrated back into school and exhibited less antisocial behaviour. For their part, the young people viewed their relationships with youth workers as extremely positive and encouraging and talked widely about experiencing empathy, respect, encouragement, equality and shared understanding.

According to Deucher and Ellis (2013), by the end of the programme, many of the young people's self-reported perceptions about and responses to the social pressures and strains they experienced were beginning to change. Interview responses indicated that they were becoming more committed to desisting from antisocial behaviour in school and, in some cases, the wider community. As social bonds between pupils and youth workers emerged, pupils indicated that they felt more able to deal with confrontational situations that arose in school. The youth work approach was deemed to generate successful outcomes in terms of increased self-control, confidence and self-esteem and the young people's ability to manage personal and social relationships. One of the success factors was a prolonged and sustained engagement with the youth workers. However, the researchers could not infer anything about the longevity of these positive effects.

Reviews in youth justice with a focus on outcomes indicate that the most successful approaches are likely to be multi-modal (Adler et al., 2016; Lipsey, 2009; Lipsey et al., 2010). For example, Lipsey's (2009) study sought to uncover the primary factors that characterise effective interventions with young offenders. He found that when risk and other characteristics of the young people were controlled, interventions that were implemented with high quality and those that embodied restorative or therapeutic philosophies, such as cognitive behavioural treatment, mentoring, counselling or skills training, were more effective than those based on strategies of control or coercion involving, for example, surveillance, deterrence and discipline. Lipsey (2009) concluded that a therapeutic approach to diversion, involving a personal relationship between the offender and a responsible adult, is an effective way of reducing recidivism. He suggests that effectiveness is not dependent on the implementation of 'brand name' programmes (p. 145):

> The findings presented here indicate that the average program of this rather variable generic sort can be quite effective if implemented well and targeted on high risk offenders. It does not take a magic bullet program to impact recidivism, only one that is well made and well aimed.

Evidence on the effectiveness of relationships

Having considered the potential of effective relationships in largely normative terms, the focus now turns to the evidence of effectiveness. The issues involved are considered in terms of the associated outcomes, how these have been measured, and the mechanisms deemed most likely to lead to change.

Outcomes associated with relational working

Eight reviews (Bonell et al., 2016; Brooks-Gunn and Roth, 2014; Butts et al., 2010; Ciocanel et al., 2017; Dickson et al., 2018; Dunne et al., 2014; Lapalme et al., 2014; Melendez-Torres et al., 2016) explore outcomes in relation to positive youth development. Lapalme et al. (2014), for example, describe improved cognitive competences, confidence, connection, leadership, civic engagement and feelings of empowerment. The findings are mixed, however, with some evaluations noting significant positive effects for some outcomes, such as improved relationships, academic achievement and psychological adjustment, but not for others, such as problem behaviour and sexual risk behaviours. These findings may be due in part to the diversity in operational features and activities or to variations in the quality of the available evidence.

Reviews that describe the evidence of mentoring effectiveness within school or after-school settings mostly focus on outcomes such as academic achievement. However, five of the mentoring reviews look at young people at risk of offending or young offenders (Abrams et al., 2014; Albright et al., 2017; Edwards et al., 2015; Jolliffe and Farrington, 2008; Tolan et al., 2008). Jolliffe and Farrington (2008) report that mentoring was associated with reduced offending rates (between 4 and 10 per cent). However, the evidence on the effectiveness of this approach varies. Some report that mentoring had positive effects on one or more outcomes (Raposa et al., 2019) but emphasise the need to remain realistic about the modest impact of these programmes as currently implemented and highlight opportunities for improving the quality and rigor of mentoring practices. Others, such as Tolan et al. (2008, 2014), examined the impact on more proximal risk factors that are considered to contribute to crime, such as aggression, substance abuse and school attendance, rather than crime itself. Tolan et al. (2014) note that activities undertaken as part of the mentoring programmes tend to differ considerably and so were unable to confirm conclusively the promising aspects of mentoring interventions.

In Ireland, the Big Brothers Big Sisters (BBBS) mentoring programme combines mentoring with regular youth work activities for young people aged 10 to 14 years. In their evaluation of BBBS, Dolan et al. (2011) found positive results on some dimensions, such as hopefulness, perceived social support and pro-social behaviour. The study also found significant trends in relation to delayed drug and alcohol use but no impact on misconduct. These kinds of 'soft' outcomes, such as increasing young people's self-motivation to change their own attitudes and behaviour, are linked in the literature to successes at other levels. These levels include employability (Blades et al., 2012); developing career aspirations (Bielby et al., 2009); preventing teenage pregnancy; providing support and improvements to mental, physical and sexual health (Headspace, 2009); and reducing violent behaviour, drug misuse and involvement with the criminal justice system (Adamson, 2011; Miles and Straus, 2008, in Department of Children and Youth Affairs, 2014).

In the same vein, a review by Dickson et al. (2013) of outcomes in youth work found that many of the methodological weaknesses in the studies, including the absence of control group or baseline measures, made it difficult to attribute observed success to the intervention. Dickson et al. also noted that without determining a 'starting point', such as young people's relationships before an intervention, or how confident young people were before participating in youth work activities, it is difficult to ascertain whether or not interventions or activities have an impact on outcomes. As depicted in Figure 5 below, Dickson et al. grouped the outcomes described in the studies into six categories.

Figure 5: Typical outcomes in youth work settings



Source: Generated from Dickson et al. (2013)

Some authors, such as Dunne et al. (2014), highlight other outcomes, including the participation of young people, volunteering and social inclusion. In their study of developmental relationships, Li and Julian (2012) found that many practitioners valued relationships but noted that funders tend to "pay for and want hard, measurable outcomes, not soft, hard-to-measure relationships" (p. 164). That said, Li and Julian suggest that the relationship itself is the central outcome that is worth investing in: "We believe it is time to make developmental relationship the very outcome that is measurable and worth paying for" (p. 164).

Measuring outcomes

There is much concern in the research literature, however, about the difficulty of attributing long-term or even short-term outcomes to working relationships between professionals and young people. One review, which focused on the health and education outcomes from the trusted adult and young person relationship, describes as follows some of the challenges with quantifying the impact of the relationship (Whitehead et al., 2019, p. 2):

> It is often difficult to quantify the impact of the trusted adult role on specific concrete outcomes due to the nature and diversity of the evidence base. A related common methodological issue is the use of weak or ambiguous definitions of the role. This means the nature, scope and degree of adult support actually received is often unclear.

Traditional effectiveness reviews address these difficulties by synthesising findings from outcome evaluations such as randomised controlled trials, controlled studies, quasi-experimental studies and before and after studies. Approaches that lend themselves to codification and so-called 'manualisation' tend to be tested and evaluated using such experimental designs. It is not surprising, therefore, that within youth justice, much of the evidence on effectiveness tends to be on programmes – which may well be amalgams of relational tools – rather than on approaches. Even here, the ground is not as solid as might first appear. In their exploration of the literature on relationship building with detained youth, Bamber et al. (2016) express reservations about demonstrating the effectiveness of programmes (p. 16):

> It can often be difficult to demonstrate that a programme alone is responsible, even one that is said to be 'evidence-based', for any changes in practice and behaviour, separate from other institutional features, such as the calibre of staff.

Two of the reviews refer to the potential of the Risk-Need-Responsivity (RNR) framework as a means of demonstrating outcomes in relational work (Adler et al., 2016; Andrews and Bonta, 2010). The RNR framework has been adopted in many youth justice and adult offending settings, including the GYDPs and Young Persons Probation in Ireland. Using standardised assessment tools such as the Youth Level of Service (YLS) Case Management Inventory (CMI), the purpose of the RNR approach is to ensure that resources are directed to young people assessed to be at high risk of offending. This model measures aspects of the young person's criminogenic needs, and several international meta-analyses have shown that if the model is implemented properly, reductions in reoffending can be detected (Andrews and Bonta, 2010; Koehler et al., 2013, cited by Adler et al., 2016).

A Scottish study of 883 young offenders found that the YLS/CMI tool was a strong predictor of the likelihood of reoffending within this population (Vaswani, 2013). Vaswani concludes that while the YLS/CMI may never come close to being a perfect tool that can predict the future, practitioners can have a degree of confidence in it. Highlighting the role of the worker in the process, Vaswani states that (p. 5):

> It is also important to note that accurate assessment of risk and need is only the start of the process, and what a practitioner does with that information, and how the risks are managed and the needs are met, is ultimately more important for improving outcomes and reducing risk.

The point here is that supporters of measurement tools such as YLS/CMI will argue that an independent measure can mark progress regardless of whether the programme in question is formal or is a more reflexive relationship-based intervention. The RNR framework, however, is not without its critics (Creaney, 2014). Some have argued that its adoption has encouraged a more 'actuarial' approach to

interventions – one that focuses on the problems that are more amenable to measurement without looking at the whole person, including their strengths (Case and Haines, 2015). Citing the literature that emphasises the importance of assessment procedures for engaging young people in planned interventions, Mason and Prior (2008) argue that the formation of the relationship needs to come before the assessment.

The economic benefits of effective relationships

The review of reviews failed to locate any studies capable of providing evidence on the economic costs of the professional relationship between the frontline worker and the young person. However, in the absence of this, economic evidence from approaches that depend on relationships, such as Le Chéile volunteer mentoring for young offenders, provides some indication of the potential gains. In his economic evaluation of the service, O'Dwyer (2017) estimates that for every €1 invested in mentoring, there is a return of €4.35. More generally, the Centre for Justice Innovation (2018) has estimated savings of £113,000 if one out of ten young people was diverted to effective supports.

Kemp et al. (2002) suggest that the informality of the diversion approach is an important factor in reducing offending and that this 'informality' helps keep the intervention costs down (p. 15):

> The practice of erring on the side of informality in responding to youth offending seems well placed to reduce subsequent offending by young people who come into contact with local youth justice officials, and to keep associated intervention costs down.

Referencing the English *No Health Without Mental Health* report (Department of Health, 2011), the Centre for Justice Innovation highlights the potential cost benefits of diversion programmes that use assessment tools that can identify unmet physical, emotional and mental health needs. These tools lead to earlier intervention that is "self-evidently preferable and also more cost-effective" (Centre for Justice Innovation, 2018, p. 9). This view is supported by Knight et al. (2017), who argue that (p. 59):

> Given the high economic costs to society likely to accrue over the lifetimes of high-risk young people, the potential economic benefits from intervening early are likely to be substantial. Obtaining such data would help support the case for funding programmes for high-risk young people that have been shown to be effective.

Due to the dearth of studies concerning economic benefits, no further consideration is given to this topic (i.e., question 4) in this report.

Summary of findings from the review of reviews

This chapter began by setting out four key questions to be addressed in a review of reviews. The first three questions covered (i) the features of effective frontline worker–young person relationships; (ii) how effective relationships are enabled or hindered; and (iii) the evidence that effective relationships bring about positive change. The main points from the chapter can now be summarised in relation to each question.

(i) Salient features of effective relationships

Regarding skills, relationship building is heavily dependent on the worker's ability to:

- Listen and pay attention
- Demonstrate genuine interest and belief in the young person
- Learn about the young person's interests and strengths
- Use 'teachable moments' to engage the young person in dialogue
- Model positive behaviours

Significant worker attributes include respect, persistence, dependability, openness and enthusiasm. In the initial stages, workers need to demonstrate commitment to the young person by providing emotional and practical supports and advocating on their behalf. Skills and attributes play a part in equal measure in developing effective relationships with young people.

Person-centred and strengths-based approaches underpin joint working, decision-making and goal setting and contribute to establishing a positive working alliance. As noted earlier, the quality of this alliance is associated with specific attributes of the worker, such as empathy and flexibility, and is negatively correlated to others, such as rigidity and a tendency to criticise (Matthews and Hubbard, 2007). A 'firm but fair' attitude, while recognising young people's achievements, helps young people achieve their goals and sustain change. Employing a firm-but-fair attitude involves negotiating, encouraging empathetically, managing problems and challenging ways of thinking or behaving without damaging the relationship. Supportive relationships with a 'trusted adult' are particularly important in building resilience among young people who do not have a history of secure adult relationships or have grown to mistrust the system. Such relationships can be challenging to establish; they require the worker to demonstrate their commitment and dependability consistently and over the longer term.

(ii) Enabling or hindering factors

In terms of enabling factors, it is important to create a culture that is supportive of relationship building. Interventions are optimal in a safe and non-judgemental environment, which includes respectful youth–staff interactions. In such a culture, relationships are best enabled by appropriate recruitment, training, staff support and supervision, volunteer screening, making a good match between worker and young person and allowing sufficient time to build the relationship. Partnerships with other agencies are important in securing connections to organisations that provide practical supports for young people. The organisational environment needs to enable learning and development through continual improvement cycles, evaluation and review. Learning and development is supported by a clear theory of change, including intended outcomes. Overall, however, the emphasis needs to be on the worker and young person's stewardship of the relationship as they navigate adversity rather than on the programme content delivering outcomes.

Factors that appear to hinder relationship development and sustainability include overly formal relationships; lack of training/supervision (particularly important with volunteer mentors); poor communication; labelling of the young person; failing to build trust; and organisational constraints, such as lack of time and lack of training and support for staff. Organisational factors such as frequent staff turnover can interfere with the daily interactions between young person and worker or can sever the relationship entirely. Administrative processes that prioritise form filling and performance management can result in less time and priority being given to relationship building.

(iii) Evidence of positive change

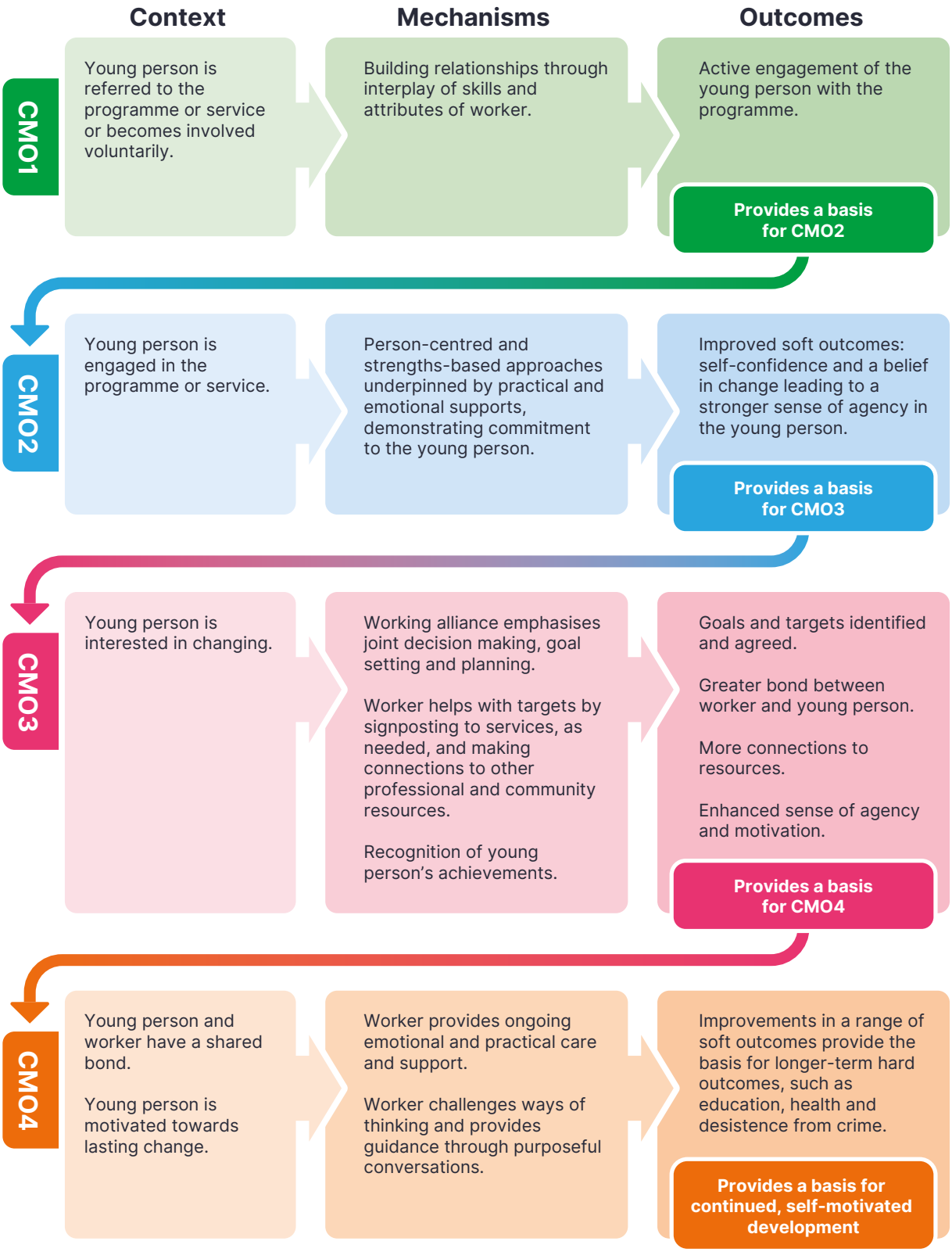
Most studies provide descriptions of the outcomes of relational working based on self-reports from young people or observations by workers. Only a small number of studies attempted to measure the benefits and outcomes using standardised measures. Some studies describe the benefits of the relationship using process-type measures, such as engagement. Others view the benefits in terms of achieving softer outcomes, such as increased protective factors; improved relationships with parents and pro-social peers; and more resilience, self-esteem, social competence, problem-solving ability and autonomy. Most studies agree that these 'soft' types of outcome, such as socioemotional and cognitive improvements and increased hopefulness, can enable young people to achieve longer-term 'hard' outcomes in areas such as health, employment, academic achievement and reduced offending.

While the available evidence on the effectiveness of the relationship is not conclusive, or mixed at best, it does provide useful insights into what is believed to work in terms of building and sustaining effective relationships. In any case, according to Whitehead et al. (2019), there is little evidence that youth–adult relationships are associated with deterioration in outcomes. When deterioration is observed, the authors note, it typically occurs in the context of weaker relationships where the adult does not truly fulfil the trusted adult role.

Basic model of effective relational working

The findings from the review of reviews confirm the importance of relational working between professionals and young people. Returning to the EMMIE approach outlined in the methodology chapter, a basic model of relational working can be outlined based on a series of linked CMO (context-mechanisms-outcomes) configurations. This involves detailing key contextual factors that enable or hinder the work (C) and the activities or mechanisms (M) that give rise to better outcomes (O). As shown in Table 8, the CMO configurations describe a theoretically promising, 'ideal' pathway for developing effective relationships.

Table 8: Basic CMO configurations from the review of reviews



The first row – CMO1 – describes the young person being referred to the programme or service or joining voluntarily as the context, the relational work that brings skills and attributes into play as the mechanisms, and the active engagement of the young person as the outcome. The outcome of CMO1 – the active engagement – becomes the starting point, or context, for CMO2, just as the outcome of CMO2 becomes the starting point for CMO3, and so on. In this step-by-step and progressive way, the model illustrates an idealised process of learning and development.

Although presented above in tabular form for the purposes of explanation, the real-world process is not linear and likely to be less clean cut. External moderators, including organisational culture and levels of family or community support, indicate conditions that are likely to enhance, slow or prevent the achievement of the intended outcomes. While understanding that moderators can help the worker to capitalise on or mitigate their effects to some extent, they can often fall outside of the worker's control. Such positive external moderators include:

- Organisation culture: supportive of relational-based practice, such as good match, structures to promote regular longer-term engagement, partnerships with other agencies (e.g., formal education, social work), recruitment procedures, training and support
- The setting: a safe agency setting that includes respectful youth–staff interactions

Negative external moderators that fall outside the control of the worker include:

- Negative influence or lack of support from peers/parents/family/wider community
- Adverse childhood experiences/unmet needs, e.g., addiction, housing, education, mental health, poverty
- Organisational factors that detract from relational-based approaches, e.g., focus on paperwork/monitoring, high case load, high staff turnover, lack of training/supervision, overly formal/restrictive/punitive environments

Conclusion

The review of reviews was instructive in providing a robust overview of the research from which a 'first cut' at CMO configurations can be used to articulate the key features of effective relational work. However, a more in-depth and nuanced understanding is required to inform and guide operational practice in the field. More specifically, there is a need to understand better the following aspects of building, sustaining and developing professional relationships with young people:

- The precise mechanisms of change involved in building relationships
- The interplay between worker skills and attributes
- The role played by a respectful, person-centred and strengths-based approach
- The nature and function of a working alliance
- The active ingredients in the move from one stage of development to another
- What it means to establish a solid connection with young people
- What is involved in demonstrating commitment over the longer-term
- The role of trust throughout all stages of development

The next chapter further explores the above themes by means of a systematic evidence review of primary, empirical studies.

4 Findings from the systematic evidence review

While the previous chapter outlined the findings from the wide-ranging review of reviews, this chapter presents findings from a systematic evidence review of primary, empirical studies that focus on relational work with young people. In mining the empirical evidence, the examination goes deeper than does the review of reviews into the features of effective relationships. The authors placed a strong emphasis on the mechanisms of change that are considered most likely to lead to beneficial outcomes. These 'potent' mechanisms include the skills and personal attributes needed to engage young people, the approaches most likely to secure and maintain relationships, the nature and function of a working alliance between workers and young people, the active ingredients in stages of development and the pivotal role of trust throughout.



While the individual studies have internal rigour and logic, they can inevitably appear diverse, diffuse and possibly incoherent when viewed collectively. To bring some clarity to this, the authors attempted to identify what the lessons from the various studies amount to. The research found three models of relational working that help to corral the evidence into a more meaningful whole that leads, in turn, to a theory of change that could be tested empirically. Research on transformational relationships by the Center for the Study of Social Policy (CSSP, 2017) and Sandu (2019b, 2020) shows how potent mechanisms can combine into broader categories that give shape, direction and purpose to the work. The Self-Esteem Cultural model (Pineau et al., 2019) is useful in drawing attention to the non-linear, cyclical and iterative nature of relationship building. Finally, the interventive relationship model (Friel and Sweeney, 2020) is helpful in highlighting the staged nature of progress towards achieving beneficial outcomes. The chapter concludes by turning the basic model of relational working, as outlined at the end of chapter 3, into a more comprehensive theory of change.

Worker skills and qualities in balance

Across the primary studies, active listening is one of the most dominant themes. For example, in a report on transformational relationships (CSSP, 2017), the authors highlight the importance of listening for the purpose of getting to know the young person rather than for completing paperwork. They describe this type of listening as going beyond the boundaries of a case in ways that exceed a young person's needs for service. The following quote from a worker (p. 5) illustrates how listening does more than merely accumulate case-related information:

> … my supervisor {said} "It sounds as if you know her, but you don't really know her." . . . And then she asks me, "What was her favorite TV show? What does she like to do on the weekends? What are her friendships like? Like does she have friends?" and I was like "I don't know, I didn't ask those questions" … we literally went to McDonalds on the block and we sat down and I was like "I want to get to know you, tell me a little bit about you." She went on about school and employment, and I was like "No no no, what do you like to do, what do your friends do?" And she started opening up… (Worker, US)

In addition to listening, the skills required to engage young people include empathetic responding, advising, guiding, modelling pro-social behaviours and the ability to challenge behaviours without damaging the relationship.

To a greater extent than in the review of reviews, the primary studies reveal that the worker's personal qualities are of equal importance to their skills and abilities. Realness, authenticity and genuineness emerge as key features in terms of making and sustaining the relationship (see, for example, Murdoch, 2016; Rodd and Stewart, 2009; and Sandu, 2019a). Related to this theme of authenticity is the ability to be congruent with their personal values and principles – the ability to 'walk the talk'. This theme is echoed in interviews with young people in the Irish VFMPR of youth programmes (Department of Children and Youth Affairs, 2014, p. 109):

> According to many of the young people interviewed, the genuineness of the relationship – 'feeling cared for' and generally feeling that a youth professional was willing to pull out all the stops in pursuit of improving a young person's situation (even if this meant challenging inappropriate behaviour) – appears to have been a significant 'affective' mechanism, predicting change, inferring that the engagement needs to be professional, but also genuine.

The primary studies show persistence to be an important attribute in terms of securing a relationship with harder-to-reach young people. Sandu (2019a) found that for young people facing severe and multiple disadvantages, relationships start with a trial period, during which the worker must demonstrate their commitment. Following this, trust can grow as the young person witnesses the worker's dependability and reliability during good and bad times (Griffith and Larson, 2016; Griffith et al., 2018; Sandu, 2019a). Workers describe how they keep track of the young people by visiting them and contacting them through texting and social media. Sandu (2019a) provides examples from one young American who described the effects of a worker's persistence (p. 6):

> She's on my back until I come back into the building. She does everything in her power to get me back into that building. That's when I started noticing that yeah, she really does care because anybody else would be like, c'mon, you're on probation. You've got mad stuff to lose. You feel me? It's weird. Just get yourself together. That's when I could say I really hit it off with her. I know that she really cared when she started just over-texting me. (Young person, United States).

The workers interviewed as part of the Transformational Relationships study (CSSP, 2017) described the need for a level of emotional maturity that allows the worker to put the needs of the young person before their own.

As shown in Figure 6, the worker's attributes include being friendly, trustworthy, fair, empathetic, genuine, dependable, respectful, persistent and having a sense of humour.

Figure 6: Key worker attributes for securing and sustaining relationships



Humour can be used to 'break the ice' and help young people to engage with services or programmes. The worker's skill in knowing when to bring their sense of humour to the relationship is described by young people as being an important part of forging the bond between themselves and the worker. This is evident from research with young people in the STEP UP Mentoring programme, which involves a partnership between Big Brothers Big Sisters of Flagstaff, Arizona and Arizona's Coconino County Juvenile Court Services. The STEP UP Mentoring programme connects local teens to positive resources in their community with the help of appropriate adult mentors. The research provides examples of how mentors use humour to help young people to view themselves differently. As one young person said (Cawood and Wood, 2014, p. 222):

> Like if I'm angry that day, I'll come over here and they'll just make jokes, make me laugh you know. Just relieve that stress off my shoulders. If I'm like sad, too, they'll talk to me and stuff like that. Relieve it.

Used appropriately, humour can serve to help clients cope with difficult situations and help workers to instil "feelings of hopefulness during times of stress at work" (Murdoch, 2016, p. 95).

Some worker characteristics, such as warmth and friendliness, seem to carry particular importance at the beginning of the relationship while others, such as dependability and trustworthiness, appear to grow in significance as the relationship develops.

The centrality of trust

The primary studies show trust as playing a more central role in securing and sustaining relationships than does the evidence from the review of reviews. Rotenberg (2010) describes trust as having confidence in another person – a sense that the person is dependable and has your best interests at heart. Young people's trust in adults has been identified as a pivotal process in building significant youth–adult relationships that can "propel a pathway of trust" (Arbeit et al., 2019, p. 106). When the young person trusts the adult, they are better able to obtain benefits from the relationship, such as the adult's abilities, resources and a capacity for caring. Trust has been described as a prerequisite to a young person's willingness to draw on someone as a mentor (Rhodes and Lowe, 2009), which can dramatically transform the relationship by enabling it to have more impact (Donlan et al., 2017).

Mutual trust is seen by professionals as being crucial when the aim of the relationship is to secure the longer-term engagement of the young person with the programme or service (Lewis, 2014a). In the evaluation of Includem in Scotland, Robertson et al. (2006) found trust to be pivotal in relation to engaging hard-to-reach groups. Once trust had been secured, the young person was said to be more willing to engage in structured work, which, in turn, led to deeper change. Similarly, practitioners featured in a pilot study describe how a trusting relationship enables tough conversations to be used as "a process of negotiated connection that allows the practitioner to challenge without deterioration in the relationship" (Drake et al., 2014, p. 31).

The role of trust in forming relationships between parole officers and their clients was explored by Vidal et al. (2015) in a five-year longitudinal study of 140 young female detainees before and after the detainees' release from a secure juvenile detention centre. The young women highlighted the importance of interpersonal elements such as trust, encouragement and motivation from the officer and professional elements such as respect, clarity and reasonableness shown towards the client. Echoing the findings of other studies (Hart and Collins, 2014; Kennealy et al., 2012), Vidal et al. (2015) suggest that the interpersonal aspect of the relationship is linked to lower levels of reoffending. They also suggest that interpersonal relationships that are marked by trust, encouragement and motivation "take the role of 'change agents' by assuming a more substantive and direct role in facilitating positive changes in offending youth through therapeutic intervention" (p. 69).

The following quotes from probation service practitioners illustrate ways in which such qualities can affect the lives of young offenders (Lewis, 2014b, p. 339):

> Probationer 1
> *He was always fair, direct, told me how it was, how it is. He didn't mince his words. He wasn't aggressive and said what he honestly believed.*
>
> Probationer 5
> *She started to trust in me, she started to believe in me and listen. She was so supportive. She showed me how to change everything. The main thing there is that she listened to me.*

Working to the strengths of young people

The primary studies place greater emphasis on the role of strengths-based approaches in making a difference to outcomes for young people. Characteristically, these approaches focus on solutions and seek to empower young people by working with them to set and achieve personal goals. As well as attempting to address deficits and needs, such approaches systematically seek to maximise the young person's strengths and assets.

Cordis Bright (2017) presents the findings from a mixed-methods evaluation of an enhanced case management approach with young offenders. At the centre of the approach was the trauma recovery model, which is underpinned by trust and relationship building. During the evaluation, young people and those involved in delivering the programme (youth offending team staff, managers and psychologists) were interviewed at different phases of the study. In addition to the interviews, young people completed questionnaires and case documentation and a 'reoffending toolkit' (which consists of tools and supporting documents to help young people to understand their reoffending profile with the aim of further reducing reoffending). The data were examined to explore implementation issues (i.e., fidelity to the programme) and outcomes.

Most stakeholders reported that the enhanced case management approach helped to build good working relationships with young people. The approach gave the worker permission to vary their practice to focus on relationship building. In one example, workers invested more time in establishing the relationship without setting an explicit structured task. The better understanding of the young person gained by the worker from this approach enabled the worker to have a more meaningful relationship, with higher levels of trust and disclosure, with the young person.

Notably, the enhanced case management approach offered an alternative way of dealing with non-compliance or breaches. For example, in a non-enhanced case management case, a lack of compliance or non-attendance at interview would automatically result in enforcement action and likely breach. In enhanced case management cases, the improved relationship meant that more emphasis was put on understanding the reasons behind the behaviour than on sanctioning the behaviour. Young people were positive in their assessment of the workers' approach, feeling that the workers had listened to them and had treated them well. They also appreciated meeting with the workers in informal settings. The young people reported that at the end of their involvement, they had made progress in most areas of their lives. They reported risk behaviour improvements such as reduced substance use, improved anger management and no further involvement with the criminal justice system. The same improvements were noted in the interviews with the youth offending team staff and in the case file analysis.

The potential of a therapeutic approach is highlighted by Naughton et al. (2019) in their evaluation of a pilot bail supervision scheme for children in Ireland. Using a quasi-experimental design in partnership with the An Garda Síochána Analysis Service, the evaluation evidenced a 37 per cent net reduction in reoffending by the scheme participants (six months after the scheme compared to six months before) compared to a statistically matched control group. The bail supervision research showed that change is possible even in extreme circumstances, such as when repeat offender young people live in very chaotic circumstances. The evaluation illustrated how tough and complex cases can benefit from what might appear to be softer, youth-centred support. One Garda (police) case manager observed that "the therapist was one of the few people who'd reached him [young person]" (Naughton et al., 2019, p. 27).

Working in alliance to bring direction

Collaborative strengths-based approaches appear to play a critical role in securing better outcomes. In the counselling and psychotherapy fields, much attention has been given to describing and measuring the relationship between the therapeutic alliance – or the working alliance – and counselling outcomes (Horvath et al., 2011). The working alliance has been described as "mutual understanding and agreement about change goals and the necessary tasks to move toward these goals along with the establishment of bonds to maintain the partners' work" (Bordin, 1994, p. 13). Devising goals and tasks collaboratively is thought to help forge the bond between the worker and young person, which, in turn, further strengthens the alliance (see Figure 7). In this case, the bond is the mediator for the working alliance and is secured by listening, open communication and trust.

Figure 7: Working alliance between professionals and young people



According to Little et al. (2015, p. 87):

> The importance of the working alliance fits with what the young people say. The young people note that their helpers resist rushing to ready-made solutions. There seems to be a back-and-forth, a serve-and-return. The helpers push them, encourage them – badger them with the truth, even – but don't make decisions for them. The young people find that the door is open for them to decide to make their own changes.

Four of the primary studies explored the role of the working alliance in achieving better outcomes. In one study, Altena et al. (2017) examined the role of the working alliance between the young person and the social worker in a homeless shelter. The authors found that young people who perceived the working alliance with their social worker to be strong and who felt supported by the social worker improved more on measures of self-determination and resilience than those who reported having a weaker alliance. These findings indicate that the working alliance is important in achieving outcomes. In a second study, Wild (2011) examined the influences of the probation officer's role orientation, the helping alliance and the young probationer's readiness for change on reoffending rates. The study used

a range of demographic data and measures, including the Dual-Role Inventory – Revised and readiness-for-change scores, from a sample of 33 officers and 314 young probationers. The study found that probationers who reported a more positive helping alliance with their officers demonstrated lower rates of probation violations and new charges. According to Wild (2011, p. iv): "Readiness for change scores were higher if violations had been handled by the probation department, if increasingly punitive sanctions were evident, and/or if the probationer evidenced a perceived problem or psychological diagnosis." Wild asserts (p. iv) that:

> Probation departments could benefit from training officers to recognize and strengthen the helping alliance with their probationers, from utilizing sanctions issued by the probation officer to increase readiness for change, and from assisting probationers in identifying an internalized problem that results in internal motivation.

Some studies (Hart and Collins, 2014; Kennealy et al., 2012; Skeem et al., 2007) with adult probationers show findings that can be transferred to juvenile probation and youth justice settings. For example, in the UK, Hart and Collins (2014) examined the link between the working alliance and the adult offender's perception of the success of probation. The authors found the working alliance to be highly predictive of the offender's perception of success and found that risk classification and offender characteristics such as age, race and length of time on probation did not significantly affect the working alliance. Hart and Collins (2014) recommend that probation officers receive training to ensure they consider the three components of a working alliance – task, bond and goals – in everyday practice, which "may prove a simple alternative to costly interventions, programmes and assessments" (p. 121). Hart and Collins highlight the need for further research to explore how the three components are operationalised by officers and offenders during their meetings.

Hope and belief in young people

The theme of hope in terms of positivity and demonstrating a belief in young people, regardless of setbacks, emerges strongly in the primary studies (Barry, 2007; Lewis, 2014a, 2014b; Murdoch, 2016; Robertson et al., 2006). Nugent and Barnes (2013) argue that to desist from crime, young people need to be able to view themselves differently and develop confidence and hope.

In their review of mentoring approaches for young offenders, Butts et al. (2010) describe the importance of demonstrating belief in change despite the apparent difficulties (p. 24):

> Establishing such a bond with even the most troubled and delinquent youth requires practitioners to suspend disbelief; to act 'as if' any youth can be turned around given enough support and the time to develop new abilities and capacities. The purpose of such relationships must always be partly affective and emotional, but partly pragmatic as well, changing the youth's situation from passive recipient of help to active provider of help.

Albright et al. (2017) suggest that such relationships require the mentor to help the young person reject negative messages and to change their mindset by focusing on their strengths and resources, thus moving towards hope and the potential for change.

Using 'self' to connect with young people

The potential for change appears to be significantly enhanced when the worker reveals aspects of their lives through openness and self-disclosure (Friel and Sweeney, 2020). 'Self' has been described as the "combination of values, emotions, beliefs and experiences that contribute to who we are as individuals" (Ruch et al., 2010, in Ingram and Smith, 2018, p. 10). Barnes et al. (2015) underline "the interdependence between the social work professional and service users, where both parties bring their own experiences and contexts to the encounter, laying the foundations for a trusting and dynamic relationship" (in Ingram and Smith, 2018, p. 10).

In traditional counselling and psychotherapy settings, disclosure tends to be one sided, with therapists refraining from divulging personal information unless the information is pertinent to their professional role. The primary studies, however, describe relationships as being forged by the worker getting to know the young person and, in some cases, by the worker 'opening up' and sharing selected information about themselves. Described by Drake et al. (2014) as incremental escalating disclosure, this sharing of experiences serves to encourage the young person to reveal important aspects of their experiences and to generate a level of mutuality/reciprocity within the relationship (Dutton, 2019). Lester et al. (2018) argue that this reciprocal sharing between mentor and mentee is part of the process of mutuality, which, in turn, is thought to foster high-quality interpersonal bonds by demonstrating empathy. This is confirmed in a study where mentors described using shared experiences as a gateway for meaningful and relevant self-disclosure (Dutton et al., 2019, p. 13): "Mentors perceived self-disclosure as intertwined with honesty, which in turn increased the likelihood of forming an authentic bond with their mentee".

Some mentors describe disclosing information about backgrounds or experiences to highlight similarities and commonalities. Most mentors describe sharing neutral information in relation to hobbies and interests, school and work, and health. Some share their views and beliefs about issues such as substance abuse, and others (fewer) report disclosing information about their own substance abuse. Among this small group, the disclosure was justified as helping the young person to hope for change (Dutton et al., 2019, p. 13): "It is OK to let them know that you are human too, and any slight misdemeanour can still straighten up and succeed".

The implication is that social workers need to be able to develop a relationship with a level of trust that facilitates the sharing of emotions. The authors note that this may require a degree of emotional exposure to completely understand the feelings of another and be able to express this in a genuine and attuned manner. Ingram and Smith (2018) note that 'use of self' presents significant challenges for professionals in managing the balance between the professional, personal and private elements of their practice.

The importance of establishing more meaningful relationships was considered in one randomised control study that evaluated how the relationship between the parole officer and parolee could be improved (Blasko et al., 2015). The approach took the form of a collaborative supervision intervention (Step'n Out) designed to reduce discrepant expectations among parolees, parole officers and drug abuse counsellors. Participants in the intervention group had 12 weekly meetings with their parole officer, and at biweekly intervals, the drug counsellor joined the meetings. The control group received 'treatment as usual' in the form of weekly to monthly meetings to comply with the conditions of release and to detect or sanction any violations.

The purpose of the intervention was to improve perceptions of the parolee–parole officer relationship (as measured by the Dual-Role Inventory) and thus improve outcomes. At follow-up, the study found that while the two groups did not differ in the frequency of drug use, the intervention group reported significantly higher relationship ratios in terms of fairness, trust and toughness and were found to demonstrate lower violation rates than the control group.

For both groups, where the parolee perceived their relationship with the parole officer to be a positive one, the parolee was more likely to achieve better outcomes. However, it is important to note that parolees deemed to be at high risk of reoffending compared to those with moderate or low risk were more likely to perceive the relationship with their parole officer as being poor. In such cases, Blasko et al. recommend that officers adjust their approach to be more responsive to their clients' needs. Overall, the authors concluded that officers trained in relationship dynamics could see dramatic improvements in the outcomes of their clients. The authors suggest that the Dual-Role Inventory or another validated relationship measurement instrument can be an important tool for officers to use to assess the quality of the relationship.

The importance of feeling cared for

The importance of having a positive role model emerges in other findings from the primary studies. For example, in Marshall's case study of a youth offending team (2013), the youth justice workers saw the relationship between worker and young person as being central to the successful delivery of programmes. One youth justice officer noted that some young people view the relationship they have with the worker as being family-like (p. 132):

> I think generally just your presence in a sense, different people have different characters, and I think different people may be perceived by young people as different roles, they might see me as uncley, or others like a mother, or a father, or grandfather… a positive role model… being aware of your character with young people… values about respect and optimism, I think that's a big thing.

The importance of feeling 'cared for' emerges in other studies (De Boar and Coady, 2007; Kelley and Lee, 2018; Ungar and Ikea, 2016). For example, young people in Sandu's (2019a) study describe the relationship with the worker as being parent-like; some of them describe the care they received as being like the love and affection they receive from a parent. This commitment of the worker was echoed in recent consultations with GYDP participants, with some describing the support they received as parent-like (Roe, 2018): "She (Youth Justice Worker) is like a second mam, its good. When my grandad passed away, she texted to see if I wanted to talk and call over" (p. 18). The same message emerged in one study of young offenders' experiences of residential treatment in California (Abrams, 2006): "My own dad never sat down and talked with me, never congratulated me on things. Just didn't bring the support I needed. This place has done that. Talked to me, congratulated me, made me feel good about myself" (p. 71).

Sandu (2019a, 2020) describes this 'family-like' frame in terms of five attributes of a close relationship (Table 9). Sandu notes that this 'unconditionality' is like family situations where transgressions do not go unchecked but where the closeness allows the worker to challenge the behaviours without threatening future support.

Table 9: Five attributes of a close relationship

1.	The worker is first in line when the young person is facing new difficulties and times of crisis.
2.	The young person uses terms such as 'role model' and 'someone I look up to' to describe the relationship.
3.	The endurance of the relationship is not contingent on the young person's behaviour (i.e., the worker's support is unconditional).
4.	The bond between the worker and young person is played out doing routine activities such as having coffee, talking through problems and working out how to get through challenges. (The relationship is strengthened in times of crisis.)
5.	The relationship is described by some young people as parent-like, e.g., father-like.

Source: Adapted from Sandu (2020)

Sandu's work (2019a, 2020) helps us to understand how the micro-processes involved in relational work combine to achieve better outcomes. Within the 'parent-like' role, the worker can challenge behaviours without substantively risking the relationship. In addition, a range of other factors combine to develop and maintain the relationship. These include workers taking risks by transcending traditional professional boundaries while maintaining strong personal ethics. This behaviour involves workers viewing the young person holistically, being genuine and routinely sharing aspects of their personal life with them. Like Sandu, Pineau et al. (2019) note that experts describe the relationship as having care at its centre. Correspondingly, when members of the public considered developmental relationships, care was viewed as both the central feature and a key determinant of whether a young person had positive relationships.

Drawing on case studies from a larger Economic and Social Research Council study to explore young people's pathways into and out of crime, France and Homel (2006) describe how a reliance on risk factor analysis to identify responses (i.e., programmes) to risks overlooked the young offender's wider needs. As a result, the young offenders reported receiving programmes that had little relevance to their criminal activity. France and Homel argue that there needs to be greater emphasis on creating supportive relationships to help young people navigate their way out of crime. They report that young people value a supportive relationship above programmes and content if the relationship is with an adult who is not judgmental and is able to offer guidance and advocacy when needed. For many of the young people, having such assistance was a critical part of helping them move on in their lives. According to France and Homel, the focus of prevention efforts should be on changing social arrangements to create opportunities and systems that facilitate the formation of such supportive structures.

Long-term commitment and practical supports

Related to the theme of care is the worker's long-term commitment to the relationship. For some young people, commitment is demonstrated by the worker 'going the extra mile'. For example, in their evaluation of a group-mentoring programme for young people in youth justice systems, Cawood and Wood (2014) quote one young woman's description of the commitment of her mentor (p. 221):

> She cares about us. She shows it and she will tell us . . . like, I like to smoke weed, so she would be like, "don't just try not to, but if you ever need somebody or if you think that you want to do something bad, even if it is 3 in the morning, you wake me up and I'll be there. I'll be there without makeup but I'll be there".

In Roe, 2018, one young GYDP participant describes how he felt about his youth justice worker's continuing support (p. 11):

> Knowing you have the support there, like they supported me all the way which an advantage was and when things weren't great at home it's great to know they are there. Even when I was in institutions, he would contact me. If it wasn't for the project, I wouldn't have had anywhere to go.

The need for and value of longer-term commitment is illustrated in the following quote from a youth worker (Rodd and Stewart, 2009, p. 5):

> Things are changing for young people, we might work with them for a few months, and they get on top of their substance use issues and then something completely different comes along . . . the actual behavioural change is so transient and chaotic, so the relationship is like this constant thing, that they can come back to, that they might not necessarily have with any other adults around.

According to Rodd and Stewart (2009), as well as meeting the young person's immediate needs, short-term or practical support helps to establish and cement the worker's commitment to the young person. Rodd and Stewart describe the provision of this practical support as an important step in the relationship-building process. Short-term interventions, where the worker allows the young person to identify their immediate needs and priorities, can be used to begin the empowerment process but can also present an important opportunity for reciprocal helping, where the worker learns from the young person without losing control. An important point is that while the young person and worker may not be able to control events, the relationship helps to mitigate the effects of harmful externalities.

Robertson et al. (2006) evaluated a model of support delivered by the Includem youth justice projects in Scotland. The support involves a relational-based key worker approach designed for young people who are considered to be at high or extremely high risk of offending. One of the aims of the model is to reconnect young people with the community by working with external organisations to support them in practical ways, such as providing them with suitable accommodation and helping them achieve education and employment goals. The model is underpinned by the six key elements listed in Table 10.

Table 10: Six elements of Includem youth justice projects

• Intensive support and supervision within the context of a trusted key worker (average 5/6 hours per week)
• Seven-day-week availability, including a 24-hour helpline
• Support packages arranged with other service providers
• Multiple other supports, including mentors and volunteers
• Maintaining 'stickability' throughout, especially during crisis periods
• Constant management support

Source: Adapted from Robertson et al. (2006)

The evaluation used a mixed-methods approach involving the Youth Level of Service (YLS) assessment tool, an 'Events and Changes' proforma and semi-structured interviews. The YLS was completed by professionals at referral and after 12 months; the proforma was completed with the young person on a weekly basis; and the interviews were conducted with the young person, their key workers and local authority social workers at baseline and after six months. It is important to note that the evaluation did not include any control or comparison group; therefore, it is not possible to rule out other explanations for observed changes. The evaluation looked at the risk of offending as measured by the YLS and statistics on offending. At baseline, two-thirds of participants were assessed as being at high or very high risk of offending; at follow-up, this had reduced to a third (as measured by the YLS tool).

In terms of offending, a quarter (24 per cent) of the young people did not commit any further offences during the project's 12-month period. Robertson et al. (2006) noted two patterns of engagement and two patterns of reoffending (p. 64):

> A common pattern was for young people to engage and improve their behaviour as regards offending and substance or alcohol misuse quickly within the first six months, but then have a setback in month's seven to nine. Quite often the return to offending coincided with other difficulties, for example, family conflict or accommodation problems. These relapses were nearly all brief and followed by a return to little or no negative incidents.

As described by Robertson et al. (p. 64), the young people who were slow to engage displayed a different pattern. They:

> . . . demonstrated a gradual decrease in negative behaviours particularly between months 3 and 6, were largely free from relapse in the second 6-month period. The group experiencing relapses had a higher number of previous offences recorded prior to referral and severe relationship difficulties. This suggests that the early apparent engagement and improvement were more superficial, so desistance was not sustained However, the long-term commitment of the projects enabled them to overcome the relapse.

Robertson et al. went on to observe (p. 64) that:

> . . . over a period of days or weeks, trust developed. After a few weeks, just over half the young people felt that Includem was very distinct compared to other services, particularly because of the greater amount of time staff spent with them and the workers' ability to listen and relate. Young people also realised that staff would not give up on them, when they continued to reach out after a young person had not been home as arranged or spent time supporting them through a crisis or children's hearing.

Being firm but fair

Evidence from the primary studies reveals how the working style adopted by the professional influences the effectiveness of the relationship (De Boer and Coady, 2007; Trotter et al., 2015; Ungar and Ikea, 2016). For example, Ungar and Ikeda identified three roles: informal supporter, enforcer, and administrator. In that study, young people spoke most positively about the informal supporters but engaged better with workers who enforced the rules for their safety yet did so with flexibility and in a manner that was appropriate to age and cultural norms. Workers who adopted a more administrative-type role were less likely to be considered as having developed positive relationships with the young people. In some instances, the young people appreciated that their worker needed to enforce rules but was able to do so within the context of a supportive relationship. Ungar and Ikeda (2016) note that "Many of the youth who reported positive relationships with their mandated service workers described instances where rules governing behavior were enforced loosely but in age appropriate ways" (p. 262). Ungar and Ikeda's research suggests that the context and the way the rules are enforced are important: young people wanted to be active participants in the negotiations with their worker for the right to influence the rules imposed on them. Ungar and Ikeda summarise the ideal worker as follows (p. 262):

> Together, youth in our sample described the ideal worker as one who is a friend who supports them unconditionally, an administrator that upholds the young person's rights and protects them, and a caregiving parent-substitute who knows how to walk the line between those two extremes.

The importance of a 'firm but fair' approach emerges as an important feature of the relationship for both offenders and practitioners (Trotter et al. 2015). In their study of youth justice workers' interview styles, Trotter et al. examined the use of what they describe as "exploratory challenging" with young people, which they characterise as "non-blaming, positive, and considerate of clients' feelings" (p. 401). Based on structured observations of 116 worker/client interviews, the team found that "when workers were assessed as using exploratory challenging skills, as opposed to confronting skills, the clients were more engaged in the conversation with both the worker and the interview as a whole." (p. 409).

This evidence suggests that some workers fulfil different functions depending on the needs of the young person. For example, Arbeit et al. (2019) examined how individual needs shape the relationships young people form with significant adults and the different supportive roles significant adults play in young people's lives. Arbeit et al. characterise these as relationships with Very Important Persons (VIPs), which they describe in terms of three groups: coach-like mentors (instrumental support), friend-like mentors (social support), and parent-like mentors (instrumental, emotional and social support). Table 11 summarises the three roles.

Table 11: Different support roles played by adults

Role	Explanation
Coach-like mentors	Guide the young person to achieve something specific or develop a particular skill by providing practical help to support competence, encouragement to support morale and positive feedback to support confidence. Such mentors focus on specific instrumental needs, including developing new skills or building on those that young people already have, but tend not to make other meaningful contributions to the young person's life.
Friend-like mentors	Offer the young person focused companionship. For example, provide a reliable presence, a new perspective and acceptance free from pressure to impress. The relationship with the friend-like mentor assists the young person to build social skills that help them form same-age peer friendships or that provide them with a bridge to regain access to supportive same-age peer friendships.
Parent-like mentors	Help the young person to develop 'a sense of self' by providing guidance with which to grow as a person, a space in which to feel connected and a foundation from which to feel supported. Young people in this category need a high level of support to supplement the support they receive from their parents, which, in many cases, is reduced due to challenges in their parents' lives, such as separation or divorce, or difficulties in their own relationships with one or both parents.

Source: Adapted from Arbeit et al. (2019)

Using quantitative methods, Marsh and Evans (2009) investigated the types of relationship between young detainees and workers in five correction institutions across four states in the USA. The authors explored if particular types of relationship are associated with young people's perceived likelihood of success in key psychosocial domains, including reoffending, substance abuse, antisocial relationships, conflict and involvement in pro-social activities, when they return to the community. Based on their analysis of the questionnaires completed by 543 detainees, Marsh and Evans presented a typology of youth–staff relationships (Table 12).

Table 12: Relationship types based on young detainees' perspectives

Relationship cluster	Component	Presence*
Balanced	Satisfaction	High
	Coping	High
	Closeness	High
Practical	Satisfaction	High
	Coping	High
	Closeness	Low
Engaged	Satisfaction	High
	Coping	Low
	Closeness	Moderate

Source: Adapted from Marsh and Evans (2009)

* Levels based on young detainees' perspectives of their relationship with a member of staff they nominated as the person they most turn to for help and advice

In the 'balanced' cluster, relationships with the nominated staff member are marked by high levels of satisfaction, coping and closeness. In the 'practical' cluster, relationships are marked by high levels of satisfaction and coping but with low levels of closeness. In the 'engaged' cluster, relationships are marked by high levels of satisfaction, low levels of coping and moderate levels of closeness. On average, the young people's perceived likelihood of success was greatest in the balanced group, followed by the practical group and then the engaged group.

Marsh and Evans (2009) also used the Post-Detention Likelihood to Succeed scale to measure participants' perceptions of their likelihood to succeed across the key psychosocial domains. The authors observed some gender differences: the overall relationship quality and satisfaction with coping strategies were most strongly associated with forecasts in social domains for females. Marsh and Evans highlight the importance of strategies to build connectedness between staff and young people, such as recruiting appropriate staff, providing them with meaningful training and helping them to maintain relationships through programmatic structure and atmosphere. The authors conclude that while further research is required to fully understand youth–staff relationships and their association with outcomes, their findings serve as early evidence of an association between the quality of youth–staff relationships and self-efficacy for success on release.

Transformational relationships

This chapter now turns to three models that can help to bring coherence to the various findings from the empirical studies. Taken together, the models describe a pathway for building, sustaining and developing professional relationships with young people. The first, from the Center for the Study of Social Policy's work on transformational relationships (CSSP, 2017), encapsulates many of the features of effective relational working (Table 13). Starting with the young person being listened to, the relationship evolves over time through persistence. As the relationship becomes established, the worker is required to be 'real' in relating to the young person. Gradually, the worker is able to challenge the young person without damaging the relationship and can take advantage of crises to show support and encourage learning.

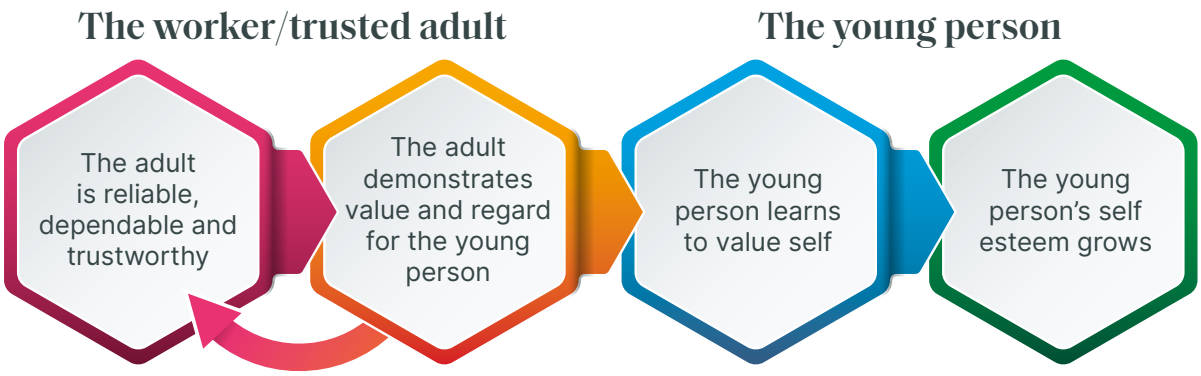
Table 13: Transformational relationships

Transformational relationship	Workers who excel at these relationships:
Starts with young person being listened to	Pay attention, listen without judgement, look for the person beyond the case.
	Spend time getting to know the young person.
	Use personal attributes.
Involves persistence over time	Are persistent, demonstrate commitment, do not give up, try again and again to get a relationship started and stick with it over a long period, even when the relationship faces significant challenges.
Requires the worker to be 'real'	Use personal attributes by revealing themselves to some extent.
	Convey something in common, understand the world the young person comes from.
Involves challenging the young person	Challenge, push and do so in a way that encourages the young person to reflect.
	Can say and do difficult things, even when the young person does not want to hear them.
	Can challenge the young person without damaging the relationship.
Involves taking advantage of crises	Demonstrate genuine care and commitment.
	Show up when not expected, stand by the young person when they are in trouble and help distinguish moments of failure from being a failure.

Source: Adapted from CSSP (2017)

The self-esteem cultural model from Pineau et al. (2019) highlights the notion of development (Figure 8). According to that study, features such as being reliable and trustworthy enable the worker or trusted adult to demonstrate their value and regard for the young person. In turn, this enables the worker or trusted adult to help the young person to view themselves in a different light. The theory is that the sense of being valued by the trusted adult has a positive effect on the young person's sense of worth, which, in turn, can lead to greater self-esteem.

Figure 8: Self-esteem cultural model

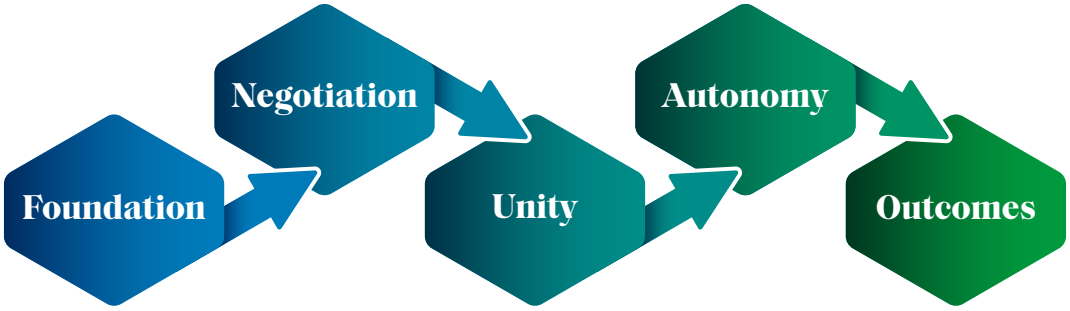


Source: Adapted from Pineau et al. (2019)

It is widely accepted that self-esteem is critical for learning and for providing the motivation to change behaviour. This developmental process depends, however, on iterative cycles in which growth can be interspersed with setbacks. The idea of a cycle is important as it suggests that the relationship is not a unidimensional or linear process. Over time, however, with commitment and persistence from the worker, the growth outweighs the setbacks.

The third model comes from Dr Breda Friel, a researcher at the University of Ulster, and Paul Sweeney of Extern, an Irish social justice charity. The model is based on five stages of relational working (Figure 9), which the authors describe as the interventive relationship. While Figure 9 presents the relationship horizontally, like Pineau et al. (2019), Friel and Sweeney (2020) stress the fluidity of the process with its capacity to move backwards and forwards as the relationship changes.

Figure 9: Stages of the interventive relationship



Source: Adapted from Friel and Sweeney (2020)

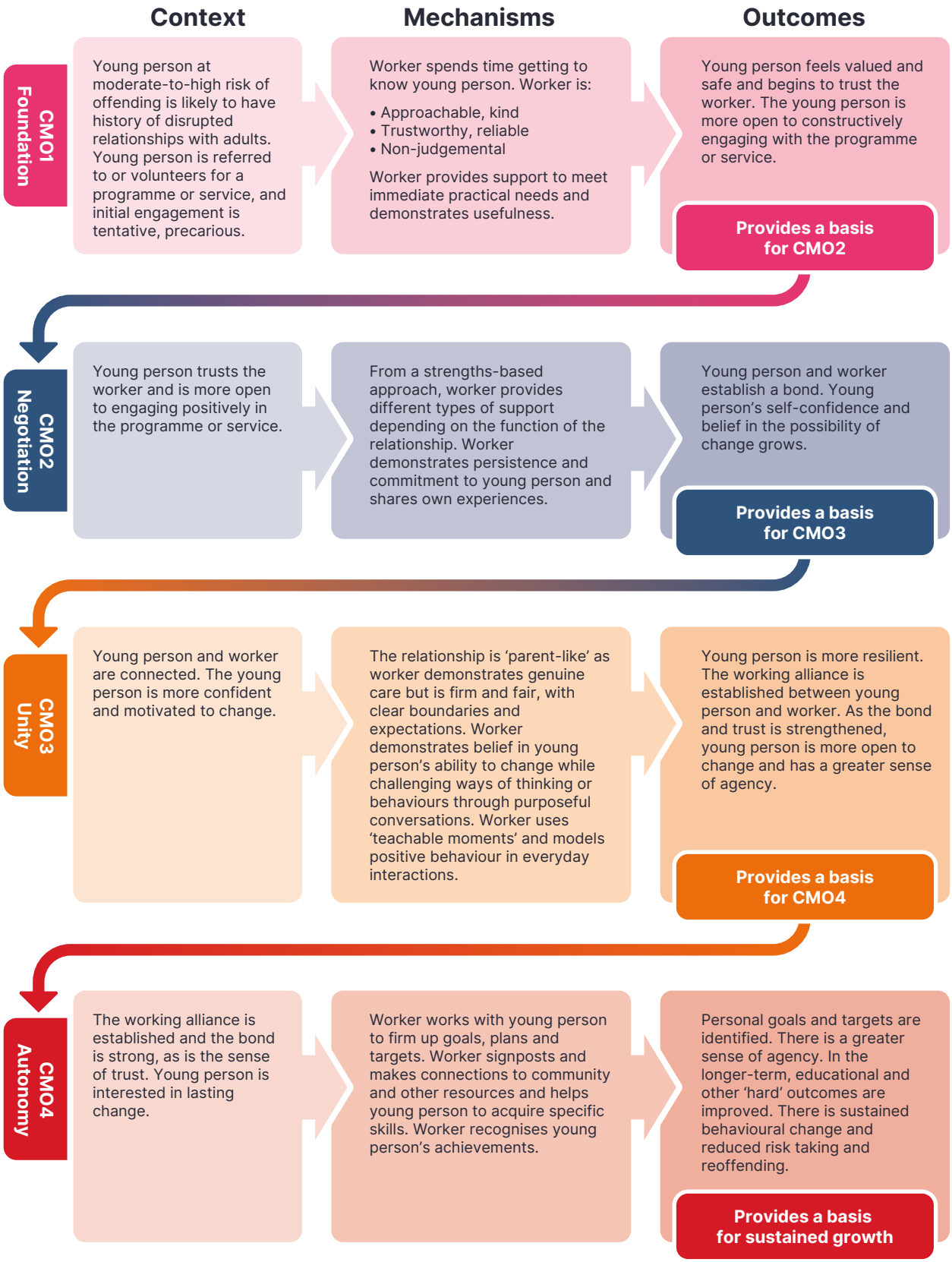
During the initial stage (foundation), the focus is on attending to the young person, establishing rapport and setting the initial parameters of the working alliance. Friel and Sweeney cite confidence, experience, authenticity and openness as worker qualities that are critical to this stage. The second stage (negotiating) requires a commitment on behalf of the worker to 'not give up', to engage persistently with the client in a nurturing and affirming manner with a view to developing rapport and empathy and assessing the young person's needs. Respect, validation, consistency and genuine interest are key to stage 2, which is facilitated by practical, hands-on activities that serve to scaffold the negotiation between worker and young person.

In the third stage (unity), the young person "considers an alternative perspective on their views and place in the world, a transformation co-created by worker and client within the context of the alliance" (Friel and Sweeney, 2020, p. 8). Important factors at this stage are the worker's "capacity for presence, advanced and accurate empathic attunement, consistency and ensuring the client feels heard and supported in their change process" (p. 8). Stage 4 (autonomy) includes supported activities in which the young person "becomes involved in more explicitly agreed objectives and goal setting" for the desired change (p. 9). The emphasis at this stage is on a review of training, attitudes and acquired skills to improve autonomy and increase confidence and self-worth. Stages 1 to 4 (foundation, negotiating, unity and autonomy) lead to the final stage of the interventive relationship – the achievement of the desired outcomes.

A theory of change in relational working

Reviewing the available evidence in the primary studies gave the authors of this report deeper and richer insights into the nature of effective working relationships between professionals and young people. The insights suggest a theory of change that articulates steps in purposeful, developmental, relational work with young people. A theory of change clarifies the various inputs, outputs, activities and outcomes of the work and how these are conceptually and practically linked. In its simplest form, a change theory makes explicit the expectations around why providing input X should lead to change in outcome Z by way of output Y. The theory of change outlined in Table 14 fine-tunes and expands the initial CMO (context-mechanisms-outcomes) configurations (developed in line with the EMMIE review protocol) set out in Table 8 at the end of chapter 3.

Table 14: Theory of change in relational working



The CMO configurations can be seen to correspond to the first four stages of relational practice set out by Friel and Sweeney (2020). As explained in Table 14, in CMO1, the context is that a young person is referred to or volunteers to participate in a programme or service. The worker then uses their attributes in terms of knowledge, skills, appropriate attitudes and behaviours to begin building the working relationship with the young person. If this initial 'foundation' work is successful, it leads to the young person's active engagement with the programme or intervention. In turn, active engagement becomes the changed context in CMO2. In this second CMO – the 'negotiation' stage described by Friel and Sweeney (2020) – the worker begins to stretch and test the young person while providing relevant support and demonstrating commitment. If employed within a strengths-based approach, this engagement is likely to lead to more soft outcomes, such as self-confidence and sense of agency.

In turn, the young person's greater sense of agency becomes the changed context in CMO3, which is what enables the worker and young person to engage in mutual goal setting and planning and for related achievements to be explicitly recognised. This 'unity' stage is characterised by a working alliance between worker and young person, which is what enables supportive connections to be made to other agencies and opportunities. This, in turn, enhances the young person's sense of agency. Finally, the young person's desire for lasting change becomes the changed context in CMO4, the stage of 'autonomy'. In this stage, workers continue to provide genuine care and support, which means that they are able to safely challenge the young people's ways of thinking and acting.

Ultimately, the whole process enables more profound and longer-lasting self-motivated changes on the part of the young person. The types of soft outcome achieved, such as greater self-esteem, are themselves more resilient in the face of relapse and influential external moderators and provide the basis for attaining longer-term hard outcomes, such as educational achievements. While all this is contingent on the strength and influence of the external moderators, including organisational factors, the theory is that the young person and worker can collaborate to mitigate these effects to some extent as they attempt to deal with adversity.

Conclusion

Taken together, the findings from the primary studies add to those from the review of reviews by providing a deeper insight into the processes involved in the development of the relationship. The studies offer further detail about the contexts in which the relationships take place and the range of potent mechanisms that contribute to delivering better outcomes. It is evident from this body of literature that there is no 'magic bullet' or easily codified approach to building relationships. For each young person, their willingness to engage with the worker, and the service, is framed by their experiences and contexts. However, the systematic evidence review has trained a lens on how the worker can use their personal attributes and skills to move the relationship through different stages. The stages involve iterative cycles of progress and regression to achieve outcomes ranging from trust in the worker (and the service) to meaningful engagement, which, in turn, helps to bring about better short-term and long-term outcomes.

5 A framework for relational practice



Over the past two decades, numerous evidence reviews have been conducted on the effectiveness of interventions in youth justice settings. While some have provided important evidence to underpin practice and policy, many of those focusing on areas such as youth development and social work have generated inconclusive findings. It is important to remember that the absence of evidence does not mean evidence of ineffectiveness. Instead, an absence of evidence may reflect a lack of knowledge about the nature of the interventions, which can make interpreting the information about outcomes difficult.

A major reason for undertaking this REPPP research was to add to the evidence. In seeking to ascertain the features of effective working relationships between professional frontline workers and young people, the authors of the research were guided by four questions:

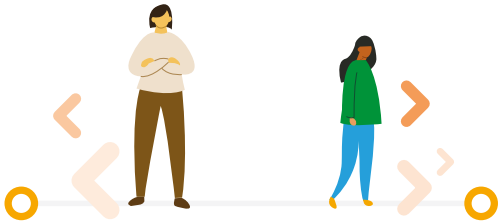
1. What are the features of an effective relationship between a frontline worker and a young person?
2. How are effective relationships enabled, and what helps/hinders them?
3. What is the evidence that effective relationships bring about positive change, and how have the benefits been described and measured?
4. What, if any, are the economic benefits of this relationship?

The authors could not examine question 4 satisfactorily due to a dearth of relevant studies in the research literature. This final chapter answers the remaining three questions by putting forward a framework that will contribute to a larger REPPP research and practice policy initiative in Ireland, the aim of which is to guide and inform relational working in youth justice settings.

Relational working in youth justice settings

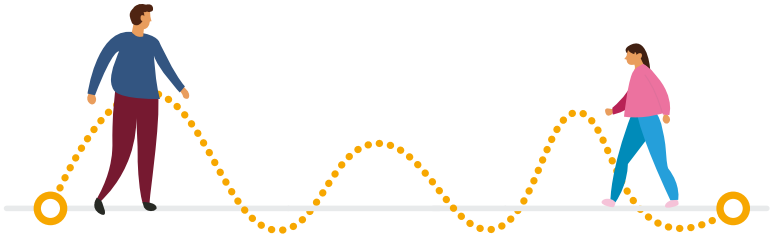
The key messages from the review of reviews in chapter 3 and the theory of change set out in chapter 4 suggest a new theoretical framework for relational practice. In the framework, the potential results of effective relationships are described in terms of intermediate, proximal (soft) and distal (hard) outcomes. While the framework encompasses external factors in terms of the positive or negative moderators that affect the work, the central focus is on the interactions between the young person and the worker. The framework is set out in full in Figure 10.

Figure 10: A framework for relational practice



Relationships are contingent

The usefulness of the mechanisms involved in developing effective relationships is contingent on a wide range of external barriers and enablers.



Relationships are fluid and iterative

Effective relationships are not linear but progress over time, sometimes stalling or regressing.

Barriers
- Organisational factors (lack of time, high worker–client ratios, focus on monitoring, staff turnover, poor training)
- Overly rigid approaches (authoritarian)
- Poor parenting
- Lack of family support
- Unmet support needs
- Poverty/disadvantage
- Adverse childhood experience

Enablers
- A safe haven
- Family support
- Pro-social networks
- Access to wider support services
- Appropriate recruitment, training and supervision of workers

Context + **Mechanisms** establishes **TRUST** as the basis for **Outcomes**

- Skills and attributes of the worker
- Strengths-based and person-centred approaches
- Working alliance involving co-production, joint planning and goal setting
- Emotional and practical care and support
- Recognition of achievements

- Authoritative (firm but fair) style
- Purposive conversations
- Challenge without damage
- Building social capital – making connections
- Balanced relationship
- Worker resilience
- Long-term commitment

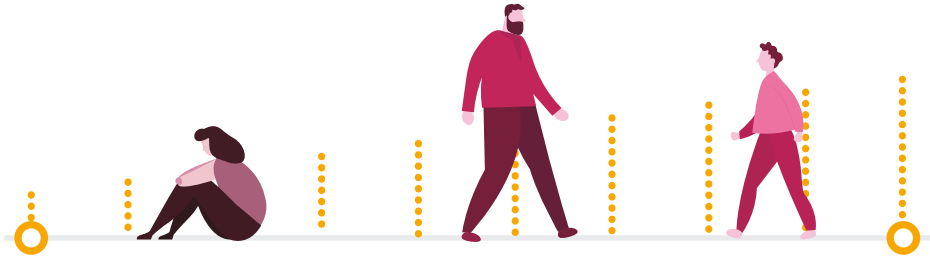
- Trust takes on many roles in the change process. It can be the outcome at the beginning of the relationship, become the emerging context at the next stage, and act as a mechanism to bring about change.
- The relationship and the trust can wax and wane over the duration of the relationship – the process is not always linear.

Soft (proximal) outcomes:
Improved:
- Communication skills
- Confidence and agency
- Planning and problem solving
- Relationships
- Determination
- Self-regulation
- Sense of agency
- Motivation to change

Intermediate outcomes:
- Trust, confidence in worker
- Engagement with the worker and process
- Feeling valued
- Bond established
- Belief in change/hope
- Working alliance
- Increased agency
- Motivation to change
- Sense of achievement
- Widened networks
- Increased social capital

Hard (distal) outcomes:
- Education
- Health
- Employment
- Desistance from offending

The starting point for the work changes in line with the developing relationship.
- Referral to service
- Lack of trust
- Building trust
- Feeling valued
- Belief in self
- Motivated to change



Relationships are developmental

The relationship goes through stages with mini cycles of development depending on trust, worker's approach and skills, the agency of the young person and external factors.

Trust in the relationship is at the centre of the framework because it plays a decisive role in every stage of development. The evidence suggests that raising levels of trust provides a scaffold for the relationship, thus increasing the likelihood of better outcomes over time. For example, returning to the theory of change set out at the end of chapter 4 (Table 14), in the foundation stage, trust emerges as an outcome of the initial work, which becomes a contextual factor in the negotiation stage. Trust then acts as a mechanism to strengthen the bond between worker and young person, thus facilitating the working alliance between worker and young person in the unity stage. Finally, trust in self and in a more positive future underpins a greater sense of agency, which is critical in the autonomy stage. Trust is so important in the development of effective relationships that professionals should always be conscious of it. Where trust does exist, it should be sustained and enhanced, and where it deteriorates or is absent, it should be rebuilt or built.

However, the process of development is seldom linear. As noted by Friel and Sweeney (2020), some relationships may stall or regress. Sandu (2019a, 2020) describes how persistence on the part of the worker can help to secure the relationship and the young person's trust in the worker. Combined with dependability, this can help to trigger the mechanisms required to enable the change to emerge. These mechanisms include the skills needed by the worker to support the young person through, for example, purposeful conversations, joint working, co-production and dialogue. In addition to the worker's specific skills, studies have identified a range of qualities that appear to be particularly important in relationship-based approaches in youth justice settings, such as having the ability to have tough, direct conversations while maintaining the relationship and the willingness to challenge inappropriate behaviours (CSSP, 2017; Drake, 2014; Lewis, 2014a, 2014b; Parr, 2016; Sandu, 2019a).

Also pertinent to the relationship is optimism – a belief in the young person – combined with the ability to instil hope (Murdoch, 2016). DuBois et al. (2011) stress the importance of similar interests or backgrounds in the mentor–young person match: "The available evidence suggests that optimal matching of youth and mentors goes beyond demographic characteristics to encompass deeper and more nuanced considerations of compatibility" (p. 77).

The findings from the review of reviews identified the importance of organisational support for the relationship. Not unexpectedly, the primary studies pointed to similar themes, such as the need for training and support for staff (Blasko et al., 2015; Cordis Bright, 2017), consistent staffing (Cawood and Wood, 2014; Roe, 2018) and time to build the relationship (CSSP, 2017; Sandu, 2019a). The primary studies also provide insights into factors that can hinder the relationship, such as the young person's personal experiences. Young people with prior negative experiences of services or adult relationships can be slow to trust the worker (CSSP, 2017; Griffith and Johnson, 2019; Robertson et al., 2006; Sandu, 2019a, 2020). Combined with feelings of shame or guilt (Sandu, 2020; Spruit et al., 2016) and poor relational skills and abilities (Abrams, 2006), these negative relational experiences can inhibit the young person's ability to engage with the worker.

The working style of the professional can also hinder the development of the relationship. For example, overly rigid approaches with fixed boundaries (Hart, 2017), unengaging adult-driven communication styles and approaches, negative attitudes and dismissive communication (Buehler et al., 2018; Barry, 2007) can stall the relationship. In addition, belittling or disrespectful approaches that make the young person feel judged can block the connection (Buehler et al., 2018; Lewis, 2014a, 2014b). Labelling or judging the young person (Murdoch, 2016) or having favourites can all damage the relationship.

As with the evidence from the review of reviews, the primary studies identify organisational barriers, many of which are often outside the control of the worker. These include administrative burdens that prioritise form filling and performance management over time spent building the relationship (Brown et al., 2018; CSSP, 2017; Drake et al., 2014). Other adverse organisational factors include poor support, supervision and training for the worker and frequent staff turnover (Cawood and Wood, 2014).

According to Marsh and Evans (2009), the setting and environment are critical. There is evidence that young people respond more positively in informal settings. Organisations that support relational approaches adopt hiring practices that focus on identifying people whose values are consistent with relational-based practice models. They also provide appropriate supervision and opportunities for professional development; support staff with self-care, which is particularly important when working with young people who are experiencing significant adversity; and provide connections to other organisations that support young people.

Overall, the evidence reveals the complex and difficult lives of many young offenders and points to the importance of identifying and meeting their immediate and wider needs. While many of these needs are outside the control of the worker, it can be very difficult for the young person to engage meaningfully with the service if the needs are not met (Abrams, 2006; Bonta et al., 2008; Duke et al., 2017; Murdoch, 2016). Other external factors that can hinder progress include wider family influences, family interference (Abrams, 2006; Duke et al., 2017; Spencer, 2007) and wider peer and community pressures (Abrams, 2006; Barry, 2007; Cawood and Wood, 2014).

Implications for ways of thinking and practising

The Irish VFMPR of youth programmes (Department of Children and Youth Affairs, 2014) identifies relationships as one of seven proximal outcomes that appear to be associated with successful youth interventions and improvements for young people. However, in the absence of clear guidance and evidence on how best to secure effective relationships, young people at risk of poor outcomes (including offending) face a 'lottery' whereby the luck of the draw determines whether or not they receive the support they need to achieve their full potential. This REPPP research provides some important lessons for policy and practice in terms of where to place the most effort to minimise the risks associated with the luck of the draw.

For policy makers, the key messages include:

- The need to commit to relational-based practice, including the provision of ongoing and appropriate training and support for frontline workers and organisations serving young people
- The need to support systems that reflect a commitment to developing and maintaining effective relationships and to removing barriers that prevent relationships from flourishing

For programme administrators, the key messages include:

- Through training and other activities, supporting and encouraging strengths-based practices that foster effective relationships, such as taking time, active listening, supporting, nurturing, making connections, demonstrating commitment, developing skills and role modelling
- Adopting recruitment policies and practices that focus on identifying people whose values are consistent with the practice model and who have strong relational skills
- Working with frontline staff to identify actions they could stop doing, with little or no harm to the young person, to enable them to focus more on relationships

For practitioners, the key messages include:

- Creating safe and welcoming environments that place the development of the relationship at the heart of the service
- Making connections with organisations that provide access to the practical supports young people need, such as education, jobs, housing and advocacy
- Tracking and assessing the health of the young person's social network and making positive connections to build social capital
- Deploying skills such as listening and paying attention, demonstrating genuine interest and belief in the young person, learning about their interests and strengths, using 'teachable moments' to engage them in dialogue and modelling positive behaviours
- Showing respect, being persistent and dependable, being open and enthusiastic and being committed to the young person
- Providing the young person with emotional and practical supports and advocating on their behalf
- Adopting respectful, person-centred approaches (e.g., coach-, friend- or parent-like role) to understand the needs of young people holistically and to respond accordingly
- Adopting strengths-based approaches to underpin joint working, decision making and goal setting in a working alliance
- Being 'firm but fair' while recognising the young person's achievements and being authoritative in helping the young person to achieve their goals and sustain change
- Negotiating with and encouraging the young person to change their ways of thinking or behaving without damaging the relationship
- Appreciating that effective relationships take time to develop and that progress goes through stages and is characterised by iterative cycles of learning and regression
- Understanding that trust is pivotal at every stage

Using the framework

Within an organisation, a framework for relational practice can be used internally to plan, monitor performance and evaluate the work and externally to summarise for outsiders the overall purpose and activities of the organisation. It can also be a useful document to have during discussions with funders and other stakeholders of the organisation. In brief, organisations can make use of a framework for relational practice for a number of reasons:

- As a tool to support service and programme design
- As a stimulus to thinking about practice
- To develop vision and goals for the future in a tangible, measurable way
- To help identify and understand the systemic nature of the work, the key linkages and cause and effect relationships
- As a basis for quality assurance procedures
- As a tool to help balance priorities, allocate resources and generate realistic plans
- As a means of informing funders and other stakeholders about the work

In short, a framework can help those involved to remain focused on the desired outcomes, to concentrate efforts on the agreed goals, to avoid duplicating work across agencies and to set appropriate work standards.

Next steps for the research

The evidence presented in this REPPP report points consistently to the characteristics of effective relational working. The research findings offer rich insights into the contexts and mechanisms (and moderators) that can give rise to better outcomes. However, the authors acknowledge that much of this evidence stems from the findings of small-scale retrospective studies, many of which have methodological weaknesses. To strengthen the evidence base, further research is required to examine the value of what Little et al. (2015) describe as "old-fashioned youth work" (p. 86), where the focus is on building the relationship to reduce the need for formal (and costly) intervention. Going forwards, the wider REPPP research is ideally placed to help secure a more robust evidence base.

This study does not offer a 'magic bullet' or a fixed set of approaches to apply but rather a set of promising principles that will be informed by practice wisdom as frontline workers interpret and implement the findings. In short, the study offers evidence of the potential benefits and associated outcomes of effective relationships. In general, the findings underline the importance of shifting some of the focus from interventions and programmes to the potential power and 'magic' of human interaction and trust for bringing about lasting change.

bringing about **lasting change**



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Appendices



Appendix 1: Terminology

Term	Description
Action Research Project	The Action Research Project is a collaboration between the University of Limerick (through the REPPP unit) and 16 Garda Youth Diversion Projects (GYDPs) to co-design practice guidance on the 'black box' of what effective relationships between youth professionals and young people in a justice setting look like.
Adverse childhood experiences	Adverse childhood experiences include being a victim of abuse or neglect as well as growing up in households in which there are issues such as domestic violence or adult substance-use problems, long-term mental health conditions or criminal behaviour leading to the incarceration of family members (Bellis et al., 2017).
Agency (sense of)	Having a sense of agency is having the ability to make and execute decisions that are important for both the worker and the young person – a feeling that the young person is actively in control of their life.
Care leavers	Care leavers are young people who have been placed in care provided directly by the state (e.g., through social services departments) or by the voluntary or private sector (e.g., Barnardo's, The Children's Society and many others).
Co-design	Co-design refers to the participatory design of a research project with stakeholders (including users of the research). Co-design is the first phase of the co-production process, in which researchers and non-academic partners jointly develop the research project and define research questions that meet their collective interests and needs.
Co-production	Closely related to co-design, co-production refers to the participatory development and implementation of a research project with stakeholders. Co-production involves practice-orientated research and case studies through an iterative process that helps to translate the research into useful and useable information or knowledge. (Coacch.eu)
Deficit model	A traditional approach to assessing needs, a deficit model looks primarily at what someone is unable to do and at their weaknesses (deficits).
Developmental relationships	A developmental relationship is a close connection between a young person and an adult or between a young person and a peer. The relationship powerfully and positively shapes the young person's identity and helps the young person's mindset to thrive. (https://www.search-institute.org/developmental-relationships/)
Dyadic relationships	A dyadic relationship includes some level of interdependency or mutuality between two people (Drake et al., 2014).

Term	Description
Empathy	Empathy is a person's capacity to recognise or understand another person's state of mind or emotion. The term is often explained by the phrase 'to put oneself into another's shoes'. Empathy can also be described as the anticipation of mutual (presumed) interests that relate to a common goal or task that partners want to realise. (Source: Council of Europe)
Garda Youth Diversion Projects (GYDPs) (Ireland)	GYDPs are administered by the Department of Justice and Equality's Youth Crime Policy and Programmes Division, which operates as part of the Irish Youth Justice Service in partnership with the Garda Youth Diversion Office. Each project is managed by a community-based organisation (e.g., Foróige, Youth Work Ireland, Crosscare, etc.). GYDPs are co-funded by the Irish Government and European Social Fund (ESF) as part of the ESF Programme for Employability, Inclusion and Learning 2014–2020. (Irish Youth Justice Service)
Grey literature	Grey literature refers to materials and research produced by organisations outside of the traditional academic publishing and distribution channels. Common grey literature publication types include reports (annual, research, technical, project, etc.), working papers, government documents, white papers and evaluations.
Hard outcomes/ distal outcomes	Hard – or distal – outcomes are easily measured and externally verifiable. Examples include a young person getting a job or an offender not reoffending.
Human services	While the field of human services is vast and has many varying definitions, it can be summed up as the interdisciplinary practice of servicing your fellow human beings, be they individuals or groups such as families or communities, with a view to alleviating stress and helping them function at their best (https://www.humanservicesedu.org/what-is-human-services/). For the purposes of this review, we adopted a definition to include social work, psychology, education, counselling, etc.
Juvenile liaison officer	A juvenile liaison officer is a Garda (police officer) who works full-time with young people who come into contact with the law.
Mentoring	Mentoring is primarily a relationship involving reciprocity and an emotional bond (characterised by trust) between mentor and mentee. The mentor is someone who has more experience and wisdom than the mentee and who offers the mentee a combination of instrumental and emotional/psychosocial support (to varying degrees).

Term	Description
Meta-analysis	Meta-analyses are designed to synthesise empirical relationships across studies, such as the effects of a specific crime prevention intervention on criminal offending behaviour. A meta-analysis focuses on the size and direction of effects across studies, presenting an overall summary statistic (effect size) that is useful for informing public policy relating to effective crime prevention efforts. The findings from meta-analyses not only reveal robust empirical relationships but also identify existing weaknesses in the knowledge base. Furthermore, meta-analytic results can easily be translated into summary statistics.
Mutuality	In the mentoring literature, mutuality is described as one of the active ingredients in the youth–adult relationship. Lester et al. (2018) suggest that highly mutual relationships occur when both parties are willing to engage in deep reciprocal sharing. The mentor offers sage counsel and empathy based on previous life experiences.
Parole	In the United States, parole refers to the period after a defendant is released from a custodial sentence. A defendant on parole faces many of the same controls or safeguards as probation (see below) but the conditions of parole can include requiring a defendant to stay in a halfway house and to continue to pay fines and discharge other financial obligations.
Positive youth development	The positive youth development framework provides an alternative to viewing adolescent development in terms of deficits. The Interagency Working Group for Youth Programs describes positive youth development as "an intentional, pro-social approach that engages youth within their communities, schools, organizations, peer groups, and families in a manner that is productive and constructive; recognizes, utilizes, and enhances youths' strengths; and promotes positive outcomes for young people by providing multiple opportunities, fostering positive relationships, and furnishing the support needed to build their skills, sense of mastery, and leadership strengths".
Probation	An offender who is placed by court order in the community under the supervision of a probation officer is said to be on probation. The offender on probation is required to comply with specified rules and conditions. In Ireland, if a judge finds that the facts of a case against an offender have been proved but do not give rise to a guilty finding, the judge can make a probation order, which puts the offender under the supervision of a probation officer for a period of up to three years. A probation order is not a recorded conviction. (www.probation.ie)

Term	Description
Realist approach	A realist approach involves synthesising research that is explanatory rather than judgemental (effectiveness) in focus. For example, a realist review seeks to unpack the mechanism of how complex programmes/interactions work (or why they fail) in contexts and settings (Pawson et al., 2005).
Reciprocity	Both worker and young person gain from a reciprocal relationship in different ways and both give to the relationship.
Review of reviews	A review of reviews – sometimes referred to as a meta-review or overview of reviews – takes a systematic approach to assembling evidence from well-designed review-level sources.
Risk-Need-Responsivity (RNR)	The Risk-Need-Responsivity (RNR) framework is an approach to providing services and supportive resources to young people and families in contact with the justice system. The intensity of programmes is matched to the level of risk posed by the individual. Interventions target specific criminogenic risk factors and needs identified by objective, research-based instruments. Responses seek to maximise the individual's ability to learn from a rehabilitative intervention by providing cognitive behavioural treatment and tailoring the intervention to the individual.
Scaffold	To scaffold means to build the learning journey step by step, with each new step being beyond the former but in reach of the learner.
Self-efficacy	The concept of self-efficacy has been used in research in two different ways: as "task self-effcacy", denoting the perceived ability to perform a particular behaviour, and as "coping self-effcacy", denoting the perceived ability to prevent, control or cope with potential diffculties that might be encountered when engaged in a particular performance.
Self-regulation	Self-regulation skills are the mental processes that enable the individual to plan, focus attention, remember instructions and juggle multiple tasks successfully (Ingram and Smith, 2018).
Signposting	Signposting is a term used by practitioners to mean pointing young people to the information or services they need.
Social capital	Social capital broadly refers to those factors of effectively functioning social groups that include such things as interpersonal relationships, a shared sense of identity, a shared understanding, shared norms, shared values, trust, cooperation and reciprocity.

Term	Description
Social support	There are four types of social support: emotional (e.g., empathy); informational; companionship (e.g., sense of belonging); and tangible (e.g., financial assistance) or intangible (e.g., personal advice).
Soft outcomes/ proximal outcomes	Soft – or proximal – outcomes describe a range of qualities and behaviours that make up personal, social and emotional development. Examples include improved self-esteem, greater self-confidence, greater resilience, better team working and improved social interaction skills.
Strengths-based approach	A strengths-based approach looks at what people have rather than what they lack. A strengths-based approach helps people to make use of their existing skills, knowledge and relationships.
Systematic review	A systematic review employs systematic and explicit methods to address a clearly formulated question. The reviewers identify, select and critically appraise relevant research and collect and analyse data from the studies that are included in the review. The findings are synthesised either qualitatively or quantitatively or both. Quantitative reviews present meta-analysis with one overall effect size.
Therapeutic alliance/ working alliance	A therapeutic – or working – alliance is described as "The mutual understanding and agreement about change goals and the necessary tasks to move toward these goals along with the establishment of bonds to maintain the partners' work" (Bordin, 1994, p. 13).
Youth justice worker	A youth justice worker seeks to divert young people who have been involved in antisocial and/or criminal behaviour by providing suitable activities to facilitate personal development, promote civic responsibility and improve long-term employability prospects.
Youth work	The Irish Youth Work Act 2001 defines youth work as "a planned programme of education designed for the purpose of aiding and enhancing the personal and social development of young persons through their voluntary participation, and which is: (a) complementary to their formal, academic, or vocational education and training; and (b) provided primarily by voluntary youth work organisations." (http://www.irishstatutebook.ie/eli/2001/act/42/enacted/en/pdf)

Appendix 2: Outline of the research process for the review of reviews

Review question:

What does the international research evidence tell us about:

1. The **features** of an effective relationship between a frontline worker and a young person
2. Ways in which effective relationships are **enabled**, and what **helps/hinders** them
3. The effectiveness of relationships in bringing about positive change, and how the benefits have been described and measured
4. The economic costs, if any, of the relationship

Websites	ASSIA, ECONLIT, ERIC, IBSS, Medline, theses and dissertations, PsycINFO, British Education Index, PsycARTICLES, PsycEXTRA, Pubmed, SCOPUS, social science journals, Australian Institute of Criminology, Campbell Collaboration, Chapin Hall Center for Disease Prevention, Cochrane Collaboration, College of Policing, Confederation of European Probation, Centre for Reviews and Dissemination, Epistemonikos, European Crime Prevention Network, National Youth Agency, Open Grey, Office of Juvenile Justice and Delinquency Prevention
Search terms	The search process included search terms to pick up aspects of the relationship (e.g., professional–youth relations* or worker–client relation*) and the young person (e.g., adolescent-related terms AND specific terms offender OR delinquent). As the review progressed, more specific search terms (e.g., working alliance, therapeutic alliance) were used to identify relevant papers that would help to better explain the mechanisms of change.
Journals	Youth Justice, Children and Youth Services Review, Safer Communities
Experts	Email requests to experts and crowd source from practitioner survey
Citation searches	Forward and backward citation searches of all relevant papers

Inclusion criteria

- Published between 2005 and 2019 in the English language
- Papers reporting on reviews or primary studies (i.e., empirical studies involving young people)
- Papers that placed a primary or secondary focus on the relationship, i.e., discussed the relationship between the young person and the frontline worker/ mentor within the context of effecting change (e.g., engagement with service/ school; behaviour change (offending, drug/alcohol use, pro-social behaviour)

Exclusion criteria

- Papers published before 2005
- Papers based on opinion (not based on primary research)
- Papers that did not focus on the relationship

Appendix 3: Outline of the research process for the systematic evidence review

The lead reviewer searched relevant websites to locate unpublished reports (known as 'grey' literature). She supplemented searches by sending email requests to key international experts. In addition, she issued requests for information about relevant papers to youth justice practitioners by means of an online survey. While some of the primary studies had been identified by the lead reviewer during stage 1, most were identified during stage 2.

The lead reviewer refined the references she found from the searches until she identified a more focused cohort to review in detail. She used Google Scholar to conduct ancestry and forward searches of key papers with a view to (a) locating the references cited by the key paper and (b) identifying more recently published material that cites the key paper. Ancestry and forward searches proved their worth by locating relevant papers that had been missed in the key term database searches. The lead reviewer stored all the retrieved studies on a shared folder and entered significant bibliographic details, including key terms, into the Endnote software package for ease of management. The lead reviewer initially conducted the database searches between May and August 2018 and updated them in August and September 2019. She identified additional papers by means of citation alerts (e.g., Mendeley) and forward/backward searches.

Given the wide inclusion criteria for the primary studies, two members of the REPPP team assessed all the eligible studies for methodological quality using a modified version of the critical appraisal tool developed by Hawker et al. (2002). The tool uses a scoring system that applies a score to a number of components of critical appraisal, including aims, methods, sampling, analysis, ethics and bias, findings, transferability and generalisability, and implications for practice. Of the 163 primary studies that were downloaded and assessed for relevance, the reviewers considered 77 in detail.

The reviewers gave each of the 77 studies a score of 0 (not covered) to 3 (well described) for each of the components listed above; the maximum potential score that could be generated was 24. The reviewers then categorised the methodological quality of each reviewed primary study as high (score 24–17), moderate (score 16–9) or weak (score 8–0). To draw out the key messages on the benefits or otherwise of relational working, the reviewers deemed all 77 studies to be eligible for analysis. Those with a higher score, however, feature more extensively in chapter 4.

Once assessed for quality, the reviewers extracted key features of the individual studies into summary tables in Word. The tables captured details of each study's author(s), year and country as well as methodological features, including aim(s), type of study, research population (e.g., young person, service provider, parent/carer), methods and data collection, relationship focus (primary or secondary) and overall quality assessment score. Once this was done for each study, the reviewers summarised the key messages relating to the four research questions in a narrative format and then coded the narrative summaries to generate first-level concepts (e.g., trust, respect) for each research question.

In addition, to capture detailed information on the factors that facilitate or hinder the development of effective relationships, for each study, the reviewers provided a short narrative description of findings pertinent to the internal and external moderators that might play a role in the development of the relationships. They then synthesised and summarised these findings in a narrative format to answer the four research questions. They grouped summaries of the primary studies in tabular form by question and study focus (e.g., youth justice, probation, social work, positive youth development/youth work/mentoring). For the first three research questions (i.e., the features of effective relationships, how they are helped/hindered and their benefits), they grouped the codes thematically.

Of the 77 studies that were analysed, 67 are cited in this report and listed in the References section under 'Primary studies'.

Focusing on effective relationship building in youth justice settings, this report is **an important resource** for translating evidence into workable next steps for programmes and practice.

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